

A NEW BODY OF PEOPLE: THE GREAT MYSTERY OF CHRIST EPHESIANS 03:01–13

DIVISION OVERVIEW (*Ephesians 03:01–21*)

God's Purpose

Chapter three begins a new division in Ephesians, “The Purpose of God for Christian Believers.” But note: the passage discusses “The *Eternal* Purpose of God.” God’s purpose for believers involves much more than life on this earth. God has planned an eternal purpose for believers.

1. First, His purpose is to make a new body of people on earth who will love Him supremely. This is what is called the *mystery of Christ* (Eph. 3:1-13).
2. Second, His purpose is to make the believer into a *mature person* filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-21).

Introduction (Ephesians 03:01–13)

Prejudice, bitterness, segregation, hatred, disturbance, hurt, anger and division rage between people. They rage in the hearts of husbands and wives, children and parents, students and teachers, employers and employees. They exist within races and religions, denominations and organizations, neighbourhoods and nations. Division in all its various forms is one of the greatest problems confronting the world. It is the most serious problem confronting God, for as long as men are divided from Him and from each other, there is no hope of men ever being reconciled to God. This is the subject of this passage: how God has dealt with the terrible division in the world. God’s eternal purpose has been to create a new body of people, a people who will love Him and each other supremely. Note that this is what is known as the great mystery of Christ.

- I. It gave Paul purpose for existing (vv. 1-2).
- II. It was a mystery: it required a special revelation to become known (vv. 3-5).
- III. It was a threefold revelation (v. 6).
- IV. It affected Paul — profoundly (vv. 7-9).
- V. It affects heavenly beings even now, profoundly so: causes them to stand in stark amazement (vv. 10-12).
- VI. It stirred a willingness within (v. 13).

I. Ephesians 03: 01–02 Purpose and Mission of Paul's Life

These two verses give a glimpse into the very purpose for Paul’s existence.

1. Paul existed to serve Christ, no matter the cost. Note: he says that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He was speaking literally; he was a prisoner in Rome when he was penning these words. He was there because he was enslaved to Christ, enslaved to the point that he would bear any suffering to share the glorious news of Christ even if it meant imprisonment and death.
2. Paul existed to be a steward of God. The word *administration* (*oikonomian*) means stewardship, management, ownership. Paul was given the duty to oversee and administer the grace of God to the world.

Thought 1. What an enormous responsibility laid upon ministers of God!

- 1) Every minister of God is a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to serve Christ no matter the cost — even if it means imprisonment.

Mat 20:28 “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:43-44 “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

Luke 22:27 “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

John 13:14 “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”

- 2) Every minister of God is a steward of God’s grace. He is responsible for ministering the grace of God to men.

1 Cor 4:1-2 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Col 1:25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

1 Th 2:4-5 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness.

1 Tim 1:11-12 That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me, thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Titus 1:3 And at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.

II. *Ephesians 03:03–05 The Mystery and the Revelation*

The mystery of Christ required a special revelation to become known. Note two points.

1. The mystery is called the mystery *of Christ* (v. 4). Just what the mystery involves is discussed in the next note (v. 6).
2. The word mystery (musterion) is defined in these verses. It was some truth that had to be revealed by God for man to know it. As verse five says: “in other generations [it] was not made known to men.” Glance at verse nine where it is said to be “this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God.” All this simply means that the mystery of Christ was...
 - a truth that was not known before the apostles and prophets.
 - a truth that could not be discovered by human reason.
 - a truth that had to be revealed by God if it was to ever be known.

Note a striking point that needs to be noted by all men. The mystery of Christ was not a creation of man’s mind, of his rationalizations, concepts, thoughts, and ideas. Man could have never Figured out the mystery. No man in this physical world could ever penetrate the spiritual world and discover the truth, no matter what some have claimed. Jesus said so:

John 3:13 “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.”

The spiritual world and the mystery of Christ had always been a mystery, and they would have remained a mystery if God had not acted and revealed them to Paul and the other apostles and prophets of his day.

III. *Ephesians 03:06 Mystery of Christ: Church, the Body of Christ*

The mystery of Christ was a threefold revelation.

1. We, the Gentiles, are fellow heirs of God with the Jews. Scripture declares that “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). Before Jesus Christ, if a person wished to be saved, he had to approach God through the Jewish religion. The Jews who really believed the promises of God were the heirs of God. (See Eph. 2:11-18; 2:11-12; Gal. 3:6-7; 3:8-9; See *Abraham*, Gal 3:8, 16; *Israel, God’s Special People*, Jn. 4:22.) However, since Christ, Gentile believers - all peoples of the earth — no longer have to approach God through any other people or religion. No matter who we are, we are now to approach God face to face through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Every person now has the glorious privilege of approaching God no matter...

- who he is
- where he is or has been
- how he comes
- what he has done
- when he comes
- why he comes

If a person is genuine in seeking after God, he can now approach God through Jesus Christ. There are no barriers — none whatsoever — to prevent him from coming to God and being adopted by God as an heir of God with all other believers.

Rom 8:15-17 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Gal 4:4-6 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Heb 6:17 *Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.*

1 Pet 1:6-7 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Pet 3:7 *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

2. We, the Gentiles, are of the same body with the Jews. No longer does man have to approach God through one body or nation of people. God’s love is universal. God is now allowing all men to approach him through the Lord Jesus Christ. God is now creating a new body of people made up of people from all nations and races - all centred around His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers now form what is called the body of Christ. But note: this means far more than just an organizational body. The body of Christ (believers in Christ) *is actually a living organism*. How is this possible?

=> By the Spirit of God. Believers are actually indwelt by the Spirit of God who energizes and empowers the spirit of believers. He creates a spiritual union by melting and moulding the heart of the Christian believer to the hearts of other believers. He attaches the life of one believer to the lives of other believers. Through the Spirit of God, believers become one in life and purpose. They have a joint life sharing their blessings, needs and gifts together.

John 17:20-21, 23 *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Rom 12:5 *So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

1 Cor 12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Eph 1:23 *[The Church] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Eph 2:21- 22 *In him [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Eph 4:11-12 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

Col 1:24 *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

Col 2:19 *He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

1 Pet 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

3. We, the Gentiles, receive the same promise of Christ as the Jews did. The promise in Christ, of course, involves all the promises of God. But note: God had promised Abraham that he would inherit the promised land and have a great nation born of his loins. That great nation was the Jewish nation. This is the reason the Jews, even today, consider Palestine their land. However, there was a spiritual meaning to God’s promise: Canaan is a type of heaven and of the new heavens and earth God is going to recreate. Therefore, the primary promise in Christ has to do with the glorious privilege of being saved and living with God and Christ for eternity in the new heavens and earth.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Rom 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

2 Pet 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

GALATIANS 03:08, 16 ABRAHAM

The scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. The scripture does not say “and to the seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to the seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.

Galatians 03: 08, 16

The Scripture...announced the gospel to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). What does this mean?

God had promised Abraham an earthly son and a great earthly nation. But behind God’s promise lay something more than just an earthly, human fulfillment. Abraham’s son, Isaac, was a type of the real offspring (the *real seed*) that was to come, and the Jewish nation was a type of the *real nation* that was to be born. (See *Abraham’s Seed*, Rom. 4:1-25.)

Paul gives at least two proofs for this typology.

1. The word “seed” is singular, not plural (Gal. 3:16). God’s promise does not point to a great crowd of people, but to one single person. That person is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. And the nation promised is the new nation of believers that God is creating to inherit the new heavens and earth (Gal.3:16; Eph. 1:9-10; 2:11-18; 3:6; 4:17-19).

2. The major events of Isaac’s life parallel the life of Christ.

=> First, Isaac was miraculously born (Gen. 15:2-3; 18:11; see Rom. 4:18-22; Heb. 11:11).

=> Second, Isaac was to be offered up as a sacrifice (Gen. 22). Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac, and God accepted his willingness and motive as an actual fact. The word of Heb. 11:17 tells us this: “by faith Abraham...[who] received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son.”

=> Third, Isaac was delivered from death by a miracle of God (Gen. 22:10-13). Abraham knew that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, in order to fulfill His promise, if need be (Heb. 11:19). □

JOHN 04:22 ISRAEL – GOD’S SPECIAL PEOPLE

*“You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.” **John 04:22***

Why did Jesus Christ come to the Jewish nation and come to earth as a Jew? Very simply stated, the Jews were God’s special people. They had been born by a special act of God. It all started long, long ago. God had wanted four things.

1. He wanted a people who would love Him supremely and give Him their first loyalty. (See Gen. 17:7; Isa. 43:10.)
2. He wanted a people who would witness to all other nations that He and He alone was the one true and living God. (See Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 13:26, 47.)
3. He wanted a people through whom He could send the promised Seed, the Saviour and Messiah, Jesus Christ, to all men everywhere. (See Gen. 3:15; 17:7; 22:18; Gal. 3:16; Jn. 4:22.)
4. He wanted a people through whom He could send His written Word, the Holy Bible, and preserve it for all generations. (Rom. 9:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:10-12.)

In searching the earth for such a people, God could find none (Rom. 1:18-32). God could do only one thing. He had to find one man and through him raise a new people, a new nation.

1. God found and chose Abraham and through him established the Jewish nation. (Gen. 12:1-5; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8, 15-19; 22:16-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 31:13; 35:9-12.) God chose one man and challenged him to worship God supremely. If that man would worship God supremely, then God would cause a special people to be born of his seed. That man was Abraham. Abraham was the first Jew (Gen. 12:1-4; Gal. 3:16). In the Old Testament the Jews and their land (Palestine) were continually pointed to as the very special people and land of God. They were called...

=> God's treasured possession (Exo. 19:5; Deu. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psa. 135:4).

=> the LORD's portion (Deu. 32:9).

=> the LORD's land (Lev. 25:23; Jer. 2:7; 16:18; Hos. 9:3).

=> the holy land (Zec. 2:12).

However, the Jewish nation failed to obey God supremely. The whole plot of the Old Testament centres around God's pleading and dealing with the Jews. Again and again, He gave the nation the opportunity to obey Him. He dealt with them in mercy and in judgment, but at every turn they refused to heed His pleading.

2. God chose the family of David. (see *Jesus Christ, King of Israel*, Jn 1:49). God had no choice but to make another move, so He chose one faithful family within the Jewish nation and gave to that family one great promise. The family was that of King David, and the promise was that of the Messiah, God's great King, God's very own Son. God's Son was to come through the line of David and establish an eternal nation of people who would love God supremely. However, the Jewish nation again failed God. They misinterpreted God's Word – the prophecies of His coming.

a. The Jews misinterpreted God's Word by saying the seed of Abraham included only the Jewish nation. In their minds, God had no children except the children of the Jewish nation. The Bible says explicitly that the seed of Abraham is Christ, and the special people of God are those individuals within all nations who worship God supremely (Gal. 3:16).

b. The Jews misinterpreted God's Word by saying that the eternal kingdom promised to David was the Jewish nation and the Jewish nation only. They expected Israel to be established as an earthly nation forever and all other nations to be subservient to Israel. But again, God's promise was not that narrow, nor was it that prejudiced. The Bible says there is not, and never has been, any respect of persons with God (Deu. 10:17; 2 Chr. 19:7; Job. 34:19; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). God did say that Christ was to come from the Davidic line, but He also said that He was going to establish an eternal nation made up of people everywhere who would love God supremely (Rom. 2:28-29).

By misinterpreting God's promises, the Jews failed to be the missionaries to the world that God had chosen them to be. They became earthly bound and materialistic minded. They twisted the idea of the promised Messiah to fit their own schemes. They conceived of Him as One who was to establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish nation alone. They failed to see that God was speaking...

- of an eternal kingdom of righteousness.
- of a kingdom that is of another dimension entirely — the spiritual dimension.
- of a new heaven and a new earth that would give each person an eternal life beyond just one earthly generation.

3. God had no choice but to make a third move. This He did by sending His own Son into the world through the Jewish nation. God sent Him so that the world through Him might be saved (Jn. 3:16-19). However, man rejected God's Son and crucified Him. This act — the killing of God's Son — was the final blow. When man slew the only Son of God, the whole world *was* involved. Both Jew and Gentile were represented symbolically in the Jewish religionists and the Roman authorities. They both actually did the plotting, sentencing, and execution. If the world were ever to be saved, it was now perfectly clear that God had to make every move Himself.

This He did once-for-all. In His eternal purpose and plan for man's salvation, God took the sins of all men and laid them upon His Son while He was being slain upon the cross. He allowed His Son to bear the sins of the world (1 Pet. 2:24). Then He took His Son and raised Him from the dead — never to die again. He did what man had always failed to do: in His Son's resurrection God began to build a lasting kingdom of righteousness, a new nation that is presently being made up of men from all earthly nations who desire and are willing to follow Jesus Christ supremely. He is calling out and forming a new people who have genuinely been born again — spiritually. These new born people shall live eternally — beyond just one earthly generation. These people are identified as His church, as a body of people who genuinely believe and follow Him. They are destined to be the inhabitants of the new heavens and earth. Believers become God's new community, new society, new race, new nation of people. They become His church, His new creation - spiritually and supernaturally born again — who comprise the true family of God (Lk. 8:21; Eph. 2:11-18; 4:17-19.)

***Eph 2:18-22** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner-stone. In him the whole building*

is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

God, acting solely upon His own through the death and resurrection of His Son, has fulfilled His promises to both Abraham and David. All the people of the nations of the world now have the opportunity to become children of God, the special people of God. □

IV. *Ephesians 03:07–09 Paul, the Minister of God*

The mystery of Christ profoundly affected Paul. Barclay points out that Paul's greatest glory was God's call and God's work (*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 145). Paul saw the dignity of the ministry, the dignity of being especially chosen by God. The ministry was a radiant privilege for Paul. God did not have to persuade Paul to be a minister. No one had to persuade Paul to teach (Eph. 4:1); to sing (Eph. 5:19); to speak for God (Eph. 4:17); to visit (2 Cor. 13:1f); to administer the affairs of the church (1 Cor.7: 1f); to give his money (2 Cor.8:1f; 9:1f). Paul did not have to be coerced. He saw his call to be a minister of God as the greatest of all privileges.

Something else of primary importance: Paul says that his call to be a minister and a preacher was a gift, a free gift of God's grace. God had the right to call him simply because God has all rights. God is God. There was no merit, no worth, no value within Paul that caused God to choose him as a minister and as a preacher. Paul simply exclaims, "what a privilege! What a responsibility! the less of the least called by God to minister and to preach!"

1. The salvation in Christ caused Paul to become a minister (v. 7).

2 Cor 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Cor 4:1-2 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Cor 5:18-21 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Eph 3:7 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

Col 1:23 *If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

Col 1:25 *I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

2. The salvation in Christ caused Paul to become preacher. Note Paul's utter humility. He had what we need: a deep, intense sense of unworthiness before God.

Acts 9:20 *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Acts 17:2-3 *As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, Explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.*

1 Cor 1:17 *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

1 Cor 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

1 Cor 2:2-4 *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.*

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

2 Cor 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

1 Th 1:9-10 *For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

2 Tim 1:11 *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

3. The salvation in Christ caused Paul to become a dynamic witness or evangelist. Note the statement “to make *plain to every one...* this mystery [salvation].”

Acts 18:9-10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”

Acts 22:14-15 Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.’

2 Cor 4:13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.

1 Th 2:4-5 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness.

2 Tim 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

2 Tim 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

V. Ephesians 03:10–12 Church and Salvation

The mystery of Christ profoundly affects heavenly beings. It causes them to stand in stark amazement at three things.

1. Heavenly beings stand in stark amazement at what God is doing in the church. This is the meaning of verse ten. Looking at several different translations will show this.

“In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (NASB).

“So that the many phases of God’s wisdom may now through the church be made known to the rulers and authorities in heaven” (Williams).

“So that through the church God’s many-sided wisdom would now be shown to the rulers and authorities in heaven” (Beck).

God’s glorious purpose in salvation and in the church is to show His love and wisdom to the whole universe — to stir every creature in heaven to stand in stark amazement at what He is doing. Note that the heavenly beings see what is happening right now.

Rom 11:33 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

Rom 14:11 *It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'*

Phil 2:9-11 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Rev 5:9-13 *And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*

2. Heavenly beings stand in stark amazement at God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. (See Eph. 1:3-14; 2:7.)

2 Tim 1:9 *Who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*

Titus 1:2 *A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.*

3. Heavenly beings stand in stark amazement at the believer's access into God's presence – at the fact that access is granted to us by *faith in Christ* (see Eph. 2:18).

John 10:9 *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.*

Rom 5:1-2 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Eph 2:18 *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

Eph 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

VI. Ephesians 03:13 Conclusion

Paul is, therefore, willing to suffer for the church. The glory of all that lies ahead for the believer is so glorious that any suffering is worth the reward. Therefore, no believer should ever *be discouraged because of* suffering or in seeing other believers suffer. It is all worth the price of whatever suffering we are called to bear, even martyrdom. ■

MATURE BELIEVER IN CHRIST: THE GREAT PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH AND THE BELIEVER EPHESIANS 03: 14–21

Introduction

This is the great prayer of Paul for the church and the believer. It is probably the second most important prayer in all the Bible, ranking second only to the Lord's model prayer (Mt. 6:9-13). Because of its importance, it should be prayed by believers every day. Certainly, this is the reason God has had it included in Holy Scripture. Note the detail as it is read and studied. Its focus is a mature believer in Christ.

- I. The prayer (vv .14-15).
- II. Request 1: for strength, power within — by God's Spirit (v. 16).
- III. Request 2: for Christ to rule and reign within — by faith (v. 17).
- IV. Request 3: for love (v. 17).
- V. Request 4: for understanding — a full understanding of all spiritual things (v. 18).
- VI. Request 5: to know the love of Christ (v. 19).
- VII. Request 6: for the fullness of God (v. 19).
- VIII. Conclusion: the encouragement to pray and trust God for the answer (vv. 20-21).

I. *Ephesians 03:14–15 The Prayer of Paul*

Note four things about the prayer.

1. The prayer was for a specific reason, a specific purpose. The words *for this reason* refers back to the eternal plan of God and the life of the Christian believer which he has discussed (Eph. 2:1-3:13). That is, Paul is referring back to the great salvation and birth of the church which God has wrought through Christ. No greater thing has ever been wrought upon earth than what God has done through Christ. Through Christ...
 - God has wrought salvation (Eph. 2:1-10).
 - God has given birth to the church, the new body of believers which He is building (Eph. 2:11f).Therefore, it is of utmost necessity that the work be completed. The work of salvation must be completed, and the building of the body of believers (the church) must be completed. This is the *great reason* for which Paul prays.
 2. The prayer was so important that it drove Paul to his knees. Kneeling is a sign of desperate need and dependency. It shows that a person...
 - is utterly dependent upon God.
 - is earnest.
 - is reverencing God.
 - is humble before God.
-

3. The prayer addresses God as the Father. Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal God, to show men just what God is like. Before Christ, men had thought of God as far away, distant and unconcerned with man and his world. But Christ revealed that this is just not true; it is a false picture of God. God is near and vitally interested in man and his world. In fact, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

The point is this: when Paul prayed to God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was praying to the God who would listen and answer his prayer. He was not praying to the ceiling, nor into thin air, nor to some lifeless concept or idea in his mind. He was praying to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the only living and true God — to the very God who would hear his prayer.
4. The prayer was also addressed to the Father of the whole family of God. That is, God is the Father of all believers who have ever believed and trusted His promise, both past and present.

II. *Ephesians 03:16 Power of the Holy Spirit*

The first request is for strength and power in the inner being, for the strength and power of God’s Spirit, for His presence and power in our lives. Note several facts.

1. The word *strengthen* (*krataiothenai*) means to be made strong, tough, enduring. It means to have energy or force; to act, endure or resist.
2. The word *power* (*dunamei*) means force, energy, might.
3. The believer needs to be strengthened with power in the “inner being,” that is, in the deepest part of his being, in his soul, in his heart, in his spirit — in the spirit that God has renewed. It is there that he must be *strengthened with power*. Why?
 - a. Because it is the only way he can overcome the flesh (sinful nature) with all its weakness. It is the only way he can conquer...
 - temptation and sin
 - disease and suffering
 - selfishness and worldliness
 - trouble and trials
 - grief and death
 - problems and circumstances(See note, *God’s Blessings*, pt. 1, Eph. 1:3.)
 - b. Because it is the only way the believer can ever lay claim to all the blessings of God and fulfil God’s eternal purpose for his life (Chapter 1-3). The believer must be strengthened with power in order to break loose from the flesh (sinful nature) and focus upon the eternal promises and call of God. Simply stated, his spirit must be strong and powerful...
 - to be everything God wants him to be.
 - to do everything God wants him to do.

4. Note the source of such conquering strength and power: the Holy Spirit of God. And note that He dwells within the *inner being* of the believer. There is no other source that has enough power to conquer the severe trials and corruptions of this world, all of which result in death and decay. No group of men — not even all the men in the world with all their science and technology — possesses the power to control the evil and death of man. We do not even have the power to make one single person perfect nor to stop one single person from dying. If there is a Power strong enough to conquer the evil and corruption of this world, it is in the Spirit of God and in Him alone. Therefore, the great prayer of the believer is that God would grant to His church — to all the believers of the world...
 - that He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.
5. Note one other thing: How do we know God will hear and answer our prayer? How do we know that God will give us this strength and power? Because of what this verse says: "...out of His glorious riches." "His glorious riches" are seen in Jesus Christ. It is God's glorious grace and salvation revealed in Christ. God loves us! That is the reason He will strengthen us with power through His Spirit. (See Eph 2:4-10.)

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2 Cor 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Eph 1:19 And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

Col 1:11 Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully.

Heb 11:33 Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions.

Isa 40:31 But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

III. *Ephesians 03:17 The Indwelling Presence of Jesus Christ*

The second request is for Christ to dwell, that is, rule and reign, in our hearts — by faith. The word “dwell” means a permanent not a temporary dwelling. It means to take up permanent residence; to live in a home; to enter, settle down, and be at home. When a person believes in Jesus Christ for the first time, Christ enters his life. Therefore, the believer is not praying for Christ to enter the hearts and lives of believers; Christ is already in their hearts and lives. What then does this request mean? Just what the verse says:

- => that Christ would be at home and live in a permanent sense within the believer.
- => that the believer would be aware and conscious of Christ within his heart — always aware and conscious that Christ has taken up residence within him.
- => that the believer would let Christ control and guide his life — permanently and constantly — because Christ is at home in his heart.

It is the presence of Christ within that motivates the believer to follow Christ. The more the believer is aware and conscious of Christ within him, the more he will *walk and live* in Christ.

Note that Christ dwells within the believer by faith. But note that Biblical faith is not a wish or hope that something is true. It is not *perhaps* something is true but *perhaps* it is not. Biblical faith always means the belief and commitment of a person’s life to truth and reality; it is a belief and commitment to fact.

John 14:20 *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”*

John 17:23 *“I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Col 1:27 *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

IV. *Ephesians 03:17 Love*

The third request is for love. This is *agape love*, the very same love God has for us (see notes, *Love*, Eph. 2:4-5; Gal. 5:13-15; 5:14; 5:22-23).

V. *Ephesians 03:18 Understanding*

The fourth request is for understanding, a full understanding of all spiritual things. It is crucial that the believer grasp God's eternal plan and glorious salvation — all that has been covered in chapters one through three:

- => the great blessings of God (Eph. 1:3-14).
- => the knowledge and power of God (Eph. 1:15-23).
- => the mercy and grace of God (Eph. 2:1-10).
- => the reconciliation and peace wrought by Christ (Eph. 2:11-18).
- => the church: who and what it is (Eph. 2:19-22).
- => the new body of people God is forming, that is, the great mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:1-13).

God has done so much for the believer that it cannot be measured. Therefore, believers must pray and seek God to increase their understanding and the understanding of all saints. All believers must comprehend the breadth, length, depth and height of what God has done for them and the church. The more believers comprehend, the more they will surrender their lives to Christ and serve Him.

Thought 1. The more we understand what God has done for us, the more we will reach out to take the love and salvation of God to a world reeling under the plight of evil, poverty and death.

1 Cor 2:9-12 *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.*

2 Tim 2:7 *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Prov 2:6 *For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

Prov 8:14 *Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power.*

VI. *Ephesians 03:19 The Love of Jesus Christ*

The fifth request is to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. It is utterly impossible to grasp and experience the love of Christ anywhere close to its full measure, but we should pray for God to help us learn more and more of His love — and we should make the request *often every day*. (See notes, Gal. 1:4-5; 3:13-14; Eph. 2:6; 2:8-10; 2:13 for discussions on the love or death of Jesus Christ. See note, *Jesus Christ, Humiliation*, pt. 2, Lk. 2:40 for a complete picture of the depth of the love of Jesus Christ.) There has

never been penned a greater description of the unsurpassing love of Christ than that of F. M. Lehman in the song, “The Love of God”: “Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade, to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forever more endure. The saints and angels song” (Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, MO).

John 10:17-18 *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

John 15:13 *“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Rom 5:8-10 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Rom 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

2 Cor 5:14-15 *For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

VII. Ephesians 03:19 Fullness of God

The sixth request is for the fullness of God. The Amplified New Testament is excellent in describing the meaning of this request:

“That you may be filled (through all your being) unto all the fullness of God... [that is] may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself!”

The believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Spirit, Christ and of God. When Jesus Christ was promising to send the Holy Spirit to believers, He promised that the trinity — the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — would all three come and indwell believers:

John 14:16, 23 *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*

The point is this: each Person of the Godhead has a different function within the believer. Therefore, the believer is to ask specific things concerning each. He has already prayed to be strengthened by the Spirit and to have Christ dwell within and control his heart. Now the believer is to pray for “all the fullness of God [Himself]” — for God and His presence in all its fullness to fill and flood him, ruling and reigning and having His perfect way in the life of the believer.

Note one other point stressed by F.F. Bruce. The preposition to (eis) suggests a progressive experience. The believer is to pray for God to constantly fill him, to constantly flood him with all the fullness of God (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 69).

Rom 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Col 1:9 *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

VIII. *Ephesians 03:20–21 Conclusion*

There is the encouragement to pray and to trust God for the answer. Note two points.

1. God is able to do what we ask. Note just how strong and powerful God is. He is able to do...
 - “immeasurably”: to surpass; to go beyond any request; to overcome and do anything.
 - “more”: to overflow and to do more than enough.
 - “than all that we ask.” to go over and above, beyond any need.
 - all we imagine. Imagine going beyond anything we can think! What is the greatest answer or deliverance we can think? God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

Thought 1. *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* points out what Scripture says about God’s power: He is able...

- to raise up children from stones.

Luke 3:8 *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*

- to fulfil promises even if they are humanly impossible.

Rom 4:21 *Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

- to make grace abound.

2 Cor 9:8 *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

- to do immeasurably more.

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

- to bring everything under His control.

Phil 3:21 *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

- to guard the soul's treasure.

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

- to save completely.

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

- to keep from falling.

Jude 1:24 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.*

(Thompson, Frank Charles. *The New Comprehensive Bible Helps*. "The New Chain Reference Bible," Indianapolis, IN: B.B. Kirkbride Bible Co., 1964, p. 153, number 3810.)

2. Note the source of answered prayers: it is the power that works within us. What is that power within us? It is the combined power of all that God has put within us, all that for which we are praying:

=> the power of the Spirit strengthening us.

=> the power of Christ indwelling us.

=> the power of love working in us.

=> the power of understanding all that God does.

=> the power of the fullness of God Himself.

Mat 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 16:25 *Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Eph 1:19 *And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

3. Note the purpose of God in answering prayer and in doing all this for us: that He might be glorified in the church through Christ Jesus. And note how long He is to be glorified: throughout all generations, world without end. ■