

# Ephesians Chapter 3

## A Deep Expository Study: The Mystery Revealed, the Mission Declared, and the Prayer That Reaches Beyond Knowledge -- Paul's Stewardship, the Church's Cosmic Witness, and the Love That Surpasses Understanding

### Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 3

#### The Chapter Where Paul Stops to Marvel at What He Has Been Given to Say

Ephesians chapter 3 is unlike any other chapter in Paul's letters. It is not primarily an argument, a correction, or an exhortation. It is a sustained meditation on wonder -- the wonder of a prisoner who has been entrusted with the most magnificent secret in the universe, the wonder of a community that has been appointed to display that secret to the watching cosmos, and the wonder of a love so vast that Paul can only describe it as surpassing knowledge. The chapter is Paul at the edge of language -- pressing words into service they were not designed to bear, reaching for dimensions of divine reality that keep breaking through the vocabulary available to him.

The chapter begins with Paul starting a prayer -- 'For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles' -- and then immediately interrupting himself for nine verses to explain what he means by 'for this reason,' what the mystery is that he has been given to proclaim, and why the church's existence is cosmically significant. When he finally returns to the prayer in verse 14, he offers what is arguably the most magnificent intercessory prayer in the New Testament -- asking that believers would be strengthened in their inner being, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, that they would know the unknowable love of Christ, and that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. The chapter closes with a doxology that reaches for infinity: to the God who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine.

This chapter is not meant to be read efficiently. It is meant to be inhabited -- slowly, with growing amazement at what God has done, is doing, and will do in and through the community of those who are in Christ.

#### The Structure of Chapter 3

The chapter moves through four major sections. First, Paul identifies himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus and the steward of the mystery -- the grace given to him to make known to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (vv. 1-7). Second, he articulates the church's cosmic mission -- to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose of

God in Christ (vv. 8-13). Third, he returns to his interrupted prayer, asking for strengthening, indwelling, comprehension of love's dimensions, and the fullness of God (vv. 14-19). Fourth, he closes with the great doxology -- to the One who is able to do infinitely more than anything we ask or imagine (vv. 20-21).

### **Opening Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 3 asking for the very thing Paul prays for at its center -- that You would give us, through Your Spirit, the capacity to comprehend what is beyond comprehension. We want to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. We want to be strengthened in our inner being with power through Your Spirit. We want to be filled with all the fullness of God. Lord, these are not modest requests. They are the requests of people who have been told that You are able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine. So we ask -- boldly, humbly, with full expectation that the God who declared His inexhaustible power in the first two chapters of this letter is the same God who receives our prayer in this chapter. And as we move through Paul's meditation on the mystery and the church's cosmic mission, give us eyes to see the dignity of what we have been called into. Let us not live as though the church is a minor human institution with limited relevance. Let us see what Paul sees -- a community appointed by God to display His manifold wisdom to the watching cosmos, a community through whom the eternal purpose of God in Christ is being revealed. Let that vision elevate our love for the church, our investment in it, and our wonder at being counted among its members. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## **Ephesians 3:1-7 -- The Prisoner and the Mystery: Paul's Stewardship of Grace**

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been disclosed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

### **IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH**

I am Paul -- and right now I am writing to you from prison. But notice how I describe myself: not as a prisoner of Rome, but as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Because that is who actually holds my life. I am in chains because of what I have been preaching to you Gentiles -- and I would not change a thing. You have heard about the role God gave me: the stewardship of His grace, specifically on your behalf. The content of that stewardship is a mystery -- something hidden for ages

that God revealed to me directly. Here is what the mystery is: through the gospel, you Gentiles are co-heirs with Israel, incorporated into the same body, and equal participants in the same promise, all in Christ Jesus. You are not second-class members of something primarily Jewish. You are fully in -- equally. I became a servant of this gospel purely as a gift of God's grace, energized by His own power working in me.

## "The Prisoner of Christ Jesus"

Paul opens his interrupted digression by naming his circumstance with a phrase that requires careful attention: he is 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus.' He is writing this letter from prison -- almost certainly Roman custody, during the imprisonment described at the end of Acts. He is in chains. He is under guard. His freedom has been taken from him by the Roman Empire. But notice how he names his imprisonment. He does not say: 'I, Paul, the prisoner of Rome' or 'the prisoner of Caesar.' He says: 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus.' This is not denial of his circumstances. This is a theological interpretation of those circumstances. The chains he wears are not the ultimate authority governing his life. Christ Jesus is. His imprisonment did not happen outside God's sovereign purpose - - it happened within it, for the sake of the Gentiles, as part of the same mysterious plan he is about to describe.

## The Administration of God's Grace

Paul describes his apostolic calling as 'the administration of God's grace' given to him for the sake of the Gentiles. The word for administration (oikonomia) is the household-management word -- from oikos (house) and nomos (law/management). It refers to the role of a steward: someone who manages someone else's household, resources, and affairs on behalf of the owner. Paul is not the owner of the mystery he is about to describe. He is the steward -- the one entrusted with its management and distribution on behalf of the One who owns it. A steward does not invent what he distributes. He does not modify it to suit his own preferences. His job is faithful distribution of what has been entrusted to him. Paul's apostleship is precisely this: he has been given stewardship of the grace of God, and his entire ministry is the faithful administration of that gift.

## The Mystery Disclosed: Three 'Together' Words

Verse 6 is the content of the mystery -- the previously hidden secret now revealed: 'that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.' Three compound words, each beginning with the Greek prefix syn (together with), each describing a different dimension of the inclusion. Heirs together (synkleronomia) -- the Gentiles share equally in the inheritance. Not a partial inheritance, not a secondary share, but the same inheritance, in full, as co-heirs. Members together of one body (syssoma) -- this word appears nowhere else in Greek literature before Paul. He appears to have coined it to describe something genuinely new: the reality of Jew and Gentile incorporated into a single body. Sharers together in the promise (symmetocha) -- the Gentiles participate

equally in the promise made to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ. The threefold 'together' structure is emphatic and deliberate. Paul does not want the Gentile believers to think of themselves as junior partners in a primarily Jewish enterprise. The 'together' is total.

## "Not Made Known in Other Generations"

Verse 5 contains a statement crucial for understanding Paul's entire theology of revelation: the mystery 'was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been disclosed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit.' This does not mean the Old Testament is silent about Gentile inclusion. What it means is that the full, explicit, clear disclosure of the mystery -- the precise way in which Gentiles would be co-heirs, co-body members, and co-sharers in Christ -- was not available in the Old Testament era with the clarity it now has through the gospel. The disclosure came 'by the Spirit' to 'the apostles and prophets' -- those who were commissioned and inspired to receive and transmit the apostolic message. The mystery Paul describes is the culmination of that progressive disclosure -- the final, complete revelation of what God had been doing all along.

## Key Observations

- **Paul's self-identification as 'prisoner of Christ Jesus' rather than 'prisoner of Rome'** is a theological claim about who truly holds authority over his life and circumstances.
- **The stewardship image positions Paul as a faithful distributor of what belongs to Another** -- he did not invent the mystery, he received and proclaims it.
- **The three 'together' words (co-heirs, co-body, co-sharers) establish the total equality of Gentile and Jewish believers** in every dimension of their standing before God.
- **The mystery was genuinely hidden in earlier generations** -- its full disclosure belongs to the new covenant era of the apostolic gospel.
- **Paul's apostleship originated in pure divine grace and power** -- grounding his authority in something Rome's chains cannot touch.

---

## Ephesians 3:8-13 -- The Church's Cosmic Mission: Displaying God's Wisdom to the Universe

*Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places,*

*according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

#### IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Even though I am less than the least of all of God's people -- and I mean that seriously, given what I used to be -- God gave me this grace: to go to the Gentiles and preach the inexhaustible riches of Christ, and to bring into the light for everyone the plan that had been hidden in God from the beginning of time. And here is the purpose behind the whole thing: God's intent is that now, through the church -- through this community of redeemed people -- His many-faceted, multidimensional wisdom would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The entire spiritual universe is watching the church and learning from it something about God's wisdom. This is happening according to the eternal purpose that God accomplished in Christ Jesus. And because of all this, through faith in Him, we can come to God directly -- with complete freedom and boldness. So I am asking you: do not lose heart because of what I am suffering on your behalf. My suffering is actually your glory.

### "Less Than the Least of All the Lord's People"

Before Paul describes the staggering commission he has been given, he pauses to express the depth of his unworthiness to carry it. 'Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people' -- the Greek word he uses (*elachistoteros*) is a grammatical impossibility in ordinary usage -- a comparative form of a superlative, meaning something like 'lesser than the least.' Paul is not merely being modest. He is being theologically precise. He knows what he was. He was not merely a sinner -- he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), a persecutor, a blasphemer, a man who hunted the church of God and tried to destroy it. That history is always present in his self-understanding. He never forgets what grace found. The person who is least -- who has genuinely reckoned with what they were apart from grace -- is the person most suited to preach a gospel of grace. You cannot proclaim the riches of Christ with conviction if you have forgotten your own poverty.

### "The Boundless Riches of Christ"

The commission Paul has been given is to 'preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.' The Greek word for 'boundless' (*anexichniastos*) means literally 'that which cannot be tracked by footprints' -- untraceable, beyond the capacity of any investigation to fully map. The riches of Christ are riches that no exploration fully charts, no experience fully exhausts, no theology fully captures. Every generation of the church is still discovering new dimensions of what is available in Christ. Every believer who has spent decades growing in grace can testify that the depths are still not reached -- that Christ is always more, always further, always richer than the furthest reach of our understanding. This is what Paul has been commissioned to preach. Not a self-help

program. Not a religious improvement system. The boundless, inexhaustible, untrackable riches of the person of Jesus Christ. To preach the gospel is to open a door onto infinity and invite people to walk through it.

## **"Through the Church, the Manifold Wisdom of God"**

Verse 10 contains what is arguably the single most exalted description of the church's mission in all of Scripture: 'His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.' The church -- this community of redeemed sinners, of former pagans and former Pharisees, of people who once were dead in trespasses and sins -- has been appointed as the primary instrument through which God displays His wisdom to the entire spiritual universe. The audience is not merely human. It is the 'rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' -- the entire realm of spiritual powers, both the angelic beings who serve God and the demonic powers who oppose Him, all of them watching the church and learning from it something about the wisdom of God that they could not learn by any other means.

The word for manifold (polypoikilos) is extraordinary -- it means many-colored, multifaceted, variegated, like an intricate tapestry or a gem that reflects different colors at different angles. A wisdom that cannot be captured in a single image or a single expression, but that keeps revealing new facets as it is turned in the light. What the rulers and authorities are learning is how God's wisdom resolves the problem that sin created. How does a holy God remain just while justifying the ungodly? How does the Creator reconcile to Himself a creation that has rebelled against Him? The answer -- the many-colored, inexhaustible, endlessly faceted answer -- is the church. The community of the redeemed is the demonstration, to every spiritual power in the universe, of what the wisdom of God looks like when it is given free expression.

## **"According to His Eternal Purpose"**

Verse 11 grounds the church's cosmic mission in the most secure foundation possible: 'according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.' The church's mission is not an improvised response to a situation God did not anticipate. It is the execution of an eternal purpose -- a purpose that preceded creation, that was hidden in God through the ages, and that was accomplished (the verb is past tense -- finished, completed) in Christ Jesus. The 'eternal purpose' language carries the same weight as the 'before the foundation of the world' language of chapter 1. The church's existence and mission were decided before the universe existed. What Paul is describing in this chapter is not a plan B. It is the eternal, primary, always-intended purpose of God, brought to completion in the cross and resurrection of His Son.

## **"Freedom and Confidence" -- Access to God**

Verse 12 transitions from the cosmic to the personal: 'In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.' The word for 'freedom' (parresia) means boldness, frankness, the confidence of one who has nothing to hide and no reason to fear rejection. The word for 'confidence' (prosagoge -- the same word used in 2:18 for access) carries the image of being formally introduced into the presence of a great person by a trusted mediator. Together, these words describe the posture of the

believer in prayer. You do not approach God tentatively, as though your welcome is uncertain. You come with freedom and confidence -- not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are in Christ. The freedom and confidence are His, shared with you through union with Him.

## Key Observations

- **Paul's self-description as 'less than the least' is not false modesty but theological precision** -- the measure of his wonder at being entrusted with so much.
- **The riches of Christ are described as 'boundless'** -- untraceable, inexhaustible, always deeper than the furthest reach of our understanding.
- **The church's primary mission is cosmic** -- displaying God's manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
- **Polypoikilos (manifold/many-colored) describes a wisdom so rich and multifaceted** that no single image or expression can capture it -- the church itself is the living demonstration.
- **The church's mission is grounded in the eternal purpose of God accomplished in Christ** -- not a plan B but the always-intended, eternally purposed display of divine wisdom.
- **Freedom and confidence in prayer flow from union with Christ** -- we approach the Father with His Son's own welcome.
- **Paul's sufferings are reframed as the Gentiles' glory** -- part of the same divine economy as the mystery itself.

---

## Ephesians 3:14-19 -- The Prayer: Strength, Indwelling, Love Beyond Knowledge, and the Fullness of God

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

### IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Because of all of this -- everything described in the first two and a half chapters -- I am getting on my knees before the Father, the One from whom every family everywhere, in heaven and on earth, gets its name and its meaning. And here is

what I am asking Him for on your behalf: out of the staggering wealth of His glory, I am asking Him to give you power -- Spirit-powered strength -- deep down in your inner life, your core, the place where you actually live before God. And I am asking that out of that strengthening, Christ would make His home in your hearts through faith -- not just a quick visit, but a full, settled, domestic presence in every part of you. And then -- from that foundation, rooted and grounded in love -- I am asking that you, together with all of God's people, would have the spiritual capacity to grasp just how immense the love of Christ is: how wide, how long, how high, how deep. I want you to know this love that is actually beyond knowing. And ultimately, I want you to be filled to the brim -- completely full -- with the very fullness of God.

### **"For This Reason I Kneel Before the Father"**

Paul finally returns to the prayer he interrupted at verse 1. 'For this reason' -- because of the mystery revealed, because of the church's cosmic mission, because of the eternal purpose accomplished in Christ, because of the freedom and confidence of access to God -- Paul kneels. The posture is significant. Jewish prayer was typically offered standing. Kneeling before God was an expression of special urgency, deep reverence, or intense supplication. Paul is not merely reciting a prayer. He is prostrating himself before the Father on behalf of the churches -- bringing the weight of everything he has described in the preceding two and a half chapters into the presence of the God who accomplished it all. He prays 'before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.' God is not merely one father among many. He is the Father from whom every other form of fatherhood derives its significance. The intimacy of the address -- Father -- is set against the universality of His fatherhood over everything that exists.

### **"Strengthen You with Power Through His Spirit in Your Inner Being"**

The first petition is for strength -- but not for any visible, external, circumstantial form of strength. The strength Paul asks for is located 'in your inner being' -- in the hidden, interior life of the person, the place where faith is exercised, where decisions are made, where the war between flesh and Spirit is fought, where love either grows or withers, where hope is either held or lost. The strength comes 'with power through his Spirit' -- the same power that raised Christ from the dead (1:19-20), now applied to the inner life of the believer. Paul is not asking for behavioral improvement, increased religious discipline, or enhanced moral effort. He is asking for the Spirit to work in the deepest place within the believer with the full force of divine power. Everything visible in the Christian life flows from that hidden strengthening. The love, the endurance, the faithfulness, the courage, the generosity -- all of it is the outward expression of an inner life where the Spirit is working with power.

### **"That Christ May Dwell in Your Hearts Through Faith"**

The second petition is remarkable in its apparent redundancy -- the Ephesians are already Christians, already indwelt by the Spirit. Why does Paul ask that Christ would dwell in their hearts as though this has not already happened? The answer lies in the

word he uses for dwell. The Greek word (katoikeo) is the same word used in 2:22 for God's permanent, settled dwelling in the church as His temple. It means not to visit but to take up residence -- to settle in, to make a home, to inhabit fully and permanently. What Paul is asking is not that Christ would move in -- He has already moved in through the Spirit at conversion. He is asking that Christ would be at home -- fully, deeply, pervasively, in every room of the inner life. This is the difference between a convert and a disciple. The convert has received Christ. The disciple has given Christ every room -- has invited Him into the places of pride and the places of fear and the places of hidden sin and the places of deepest longing, and has allowed His presence to transform each room from the inside out.

### **"Rooted and Established in Love"**

Before Paul can articulate the petition about comprehending love's dimensions, he describes the condition that makes such comprehension possible: being 'rooted and established in love.' The two metaphors work together. 'Rooted' is agricultural -- the image of a tree whose roots have gone deep into the soil, drawing nourishment from it, anchored against storms by the depth of the root system. 'Established' is architectural -- the image of a building set on a solid foundation, unable to be shifted by the forces that press against it. Love is the soil. Love is the foundation. Before the believer can comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love, they must be living in it -- rooted in the love of God that has been poured into their hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5), established in the love that elected them before the foundation of the world.

### **"To Grasp How Wide and Long and High and Deep"**

The petition to comprehend the love of Christ is addressed not to the individual in isolation but to the community: 'together with all the Lord's holy people.' The comprehension Paul prays for is not a private mystical achievement. It is a corporate discovery -- something that happens as the community of faith together explores the dimensions of a love that no individual life can fully map. The four dimensions Paul names -- wide, long, high, deep -- express unmappable totality. Paul is not providing a theological map of love's dimensions. He is expressing the inexpressibility of a love that cannot be dimensioned. Wide -- you cannot find its edge going in either direction. Long -- you cannot find its beginning or its end in time. High -- you cannot find its ceiling. Deep -- you cannot find its floor. In every direction, in every dimension, the love of Christ exceeds the capacity of measurement. The prayer is that the Ephesians would have the spiritual capacity -- given by God through the Spirit, together with all the saints -- to grasp a love whose dimensions are beyond all grasping.

### **"To Know This Love That Surpasses Knowledge"**

Verse 19 contains one of the most deliberately self-contradicting phrases in the New Testament: Paul asks that the Ephesians would 'know this love that surpasses knowledge.' To know the unknowable. To comprehend the incomprehensible. To grasp what cannot be fully grasped. This is not sloppy thinking -- it is precise theology. The love of Christ is not irrational or incoherent. But it exceeds the capacity of any human cognitive framework to fully contain it. It can be genuinely known -- entered into, experienced, trusted, relied upon -- but it cannot be exhaustively known in the sense

that the knower has now fully mapped and possessed the object of their knowledge. This is the nature of knowing a Person rather than knowing a proposition. Every deepening of the knowledge reveals more of what is still unknown. Every experience of the love opens new vistas of what is still to be explored. The proper response to the knowledge of Christ's love is not the confidence of one who has now understood everything, but the growing wonder of one who keeps discovering that there is always more.

## "Filled to the Measure of All the Fullness of God"

The petition reaches its culmination -- and its greatest apparent impossibility -- in the closing phrase: 'that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.' The fullness of God (*pleroma theou*) refers to the entire totality of what God is -- His love, His holiness, His power, His wisdom, His grace, His beauty, His truth. Paul is asking that human beings would be filled with that. This is not a prayer for believers to become God -- the distinction between Creator and creature is permanent and uncrossable. It is a prayer for believers to be as fully indwelt, as completely characterized by, as thoroughly permeated with the presence and character of God as the limitations of creaturely existence allow. The phrase echoes and answers the closing declaration of chapter 1 -- that the church is the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way (1:23). The gap between what we are and what God intends is bridged not by our effort but by His filling.

## Key Observations

- **Paul kneels** -- an unusual posture indicating the special urgency and weight of what he is about to ask.
  - **The inner being is the primary location of spiritual strengthening** -- all visible Christian virtue flows from the hidden interior life where the Spirit works.
  - **'Dwell' (*katoikeo*) indicates full, settled, domestic inhabitation** -- not visitation but making a home in every room of the believer's inner life.
  - **Comprehension of love's dimensions is a corporate, communal discovery** -- not a private mystical achievement but something grasped together with all the saints.
  - **The four dimensions express unmappable totality** -- wherever you reach for the boundary of Christ's love, there is no boundary.
  - **'To know this love that surpasses knowledge' is intentionally self-contradicting** -- describing an experience that exceeds cognitive frameworks while genuinely engaging them.
  - **'Filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' is the most ambitious petition in the New Testament** -- the maximum possible participation of finite creatures in the infinite divine life.
-

# Ephesians 3:20-21 -- The Doxology: Beyond All We Ask or Imagine

*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 him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

## IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Now -- to the One who is able to do immeasurably, infinitely more than anything we could ever ask for or even dream up -- to the One whose power is already at work inside us right now -- to Him be all the glory. Let it show in the church. Let it show in Christ Jesus. In every generation. Forever and ever. Amen.

## "Immeasurably More Than All We Ask or Imagine"

The prayer reaches its conclusion and immediately turns upward in an act of praise that gathers everything Paul has said in the chapter into a single, soaring declaration. The doxology opens with a description of God that is itself staggering: He is the One who is able to do 'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.' The Greek phrase (hyperekperissou) is another of Paul's grammatical superlatives -- he stacks intensifying prefixes to reach for an expression that means something like 'beyond all measure and beyond all abundance.' It is not merely more than we ask -- it is beyond more than we ask. It is not merely more than we imagine -- it is beyond more than we imagine. Every extravagant request in the prayer Paul has just offered -- strengthening with divine power in the inner being, Christ fully at home in the heart, the comprehension of unmeasurable love, the fullness of God -- all of it, and infinitely more, is within the capacity of the God to whom the prayer is addressed.

This is the function of the doxology in its context. Paul has just offered what may be the most ambitious intercessory prayer in the New Testament. The natural human response to such a prayer is doubt -- surely this is too much to ask for. The doxology answers that doubt before it can take hold: the God you are praying to is able to do immeasurably more than all this. The problem is not the size of the request. The problem is always the smallness of our asking and our imagining.

## "According to His Power That Is at Work Within Us"

The capacity Paul ascribes to God is not merely theoretical. It is not the capacity of a God who could do all this in principle but has chosen not to in practice. It is the power that is already at work within us -- the same resurrection power described in 1:19-20, already operative in the community of faith, already producing what no human effort could produce. The doxology is not a hope that God might someday begin to exercise His power on our behalf. It is a declaration that the power is already working -- in us, through us, among us -- and that its capacity exceeds everything we have asked or imagined it to be.

## "Glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus"

The direction of the doxology is equally important: 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.' Glory goes to God. But it goes to Him specifically through two instruments placed side by side: the church and Christ Jesus. Not Christ alone -- though Christ is always primary. Christ and the church together. The same pairing that appeared in 1:22-23, where Christ is head and the church is His body and fullness. The glory that belongs to God is displayed through His Son and through His Son's community. The church is not merely a recipient of God's glory -- it is an instrument of it. Its life of grace, its corporate unity, its love across every human dividing line, its worship, its service, its endurance in suffering -- all of it returns glory to the God who accomplished it all. 'Throughout all generations, for ever and ever' places the doxology in its eternal frame. This is not a momentary praise -- it is the declaration of an eternal reality.

### Key Observations

- **Hyperekperissou (immeasurably more) expresses a capacity that places even Paul's most ambitious petitions within the easy range of God's ability.**
- **The capacity is not theoretical** -- it is the power already at work within us, already producing what no human effort could generate.
- **Glory goes to God through both Christ and the church** -- the church is not merely a recipient of glory but an instrument of it.
- **'Throughout all generations, for ever and ever' places the church's glorification of God in its eternal frame** -- a praise that will never end and never be exhausted.

---

## What This Chapter Means for Us Today

### 1. Your Circumstances Do Not Define Your Identity -- Christ Does

Paul writes this chapter as a prisoner. His freedom has been taken. His future in human terms is uncertain. His ministry has been interrupted by circumstances outside his control. And yet from prison he writes one of the most magnificent theological meditations in history, identifies himself as 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus' rather than of Rome, and declares without self-pity that his sufferings are the Gentiles' glory. The reframing is not psychological denial -- it is theological clarity. When you know who you belong to and what you have been given to do, no external circumstance can define you. Not illness. Not financial loss. Not broken relationships. Not professional failure. Not the hostility of those who oppose what you believe. You are held by a purpose that preceded creation and will outlast every earthly opposition.

## **2. You Have Been Given More Than You Know**

The three 'together' words of verse 6 -- co-heirs, co-body members, co-sharers -- describe a fullness of belonging that most believers have barely begun to inhabit. You have equal standing with every believer who has ever lived. You have the same access to the Father, through the same Son, by the same Spirit. You share in the same inheritance, the same promise, the same body. The gospel has given you more than you know how to receive. One of the most important practices of the Christian life is the slow, Spirit-aided discovery of what has already been given -- not striving for something you do not yet have, but learning to inhabit the fullness of what the gospel has already placed in your hands.

## **3. The Church's Mission Is Bigger Than You Can See**

The church you belong to -- however small, however imperfect, however invisible in the surrounding culture -- is participating in a mission that has a cosmic audience. Every time your church crosses a racial line in genuine love, every time it forgives what the world would retaliate against, every time it gathers in worship from genuinely diverse backgrounds and holds together around the cross, it is displaying the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The angels are watching. The spiritual powers are learning. The eternal purpose of God is being advanced. You are not part of a minor institution struggling for cultural relevance. You are part of the primary instrument through which God is displaying His wisdom to the universe. Take the church seriously. Give yourself to it completely. The stakes are cosmic.

## **4. Pray Paul's Prayer -- For Yourself and For Others**

Ephesians 3:14-19 is one of the most powerful models for intercessory prayer in the New Testament -- and one of the most neglected. We tend to pray for circumstances. Paul prays for the inner life. We ask God to change what is happening around the person. Paul asks God to change what is happening inside the person. We pray for health and provision and protection. Paul prays for Spirit-empowered strengthening in the inner being, for Christ to be thoroughly at home in the heart, for the comprehension of a love that surpasses knowledge, for the fullness of God. Make this prayer yours. Pray it for your children, your friends, your church community, yourself. It is one of the highest prayers available to us.

## **5. Pray Bigger -- Because God Can Do More Than You Ask or Imagine**

The closing doxology is both a declaration and an invitation. It is a declaration about who God is -- the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. And it is an implicit invitation to ask bigger, imagine more, and then trust that even the most ambitious request falls within the easy range of God's already-working power. The problem in most Christian prayer is not that we ask too much -- it is that we ask too little. We have been conditioned by repeated disappointment and by a practical theology that has shrunk God to the size of what we have so far experienced. The doxology of

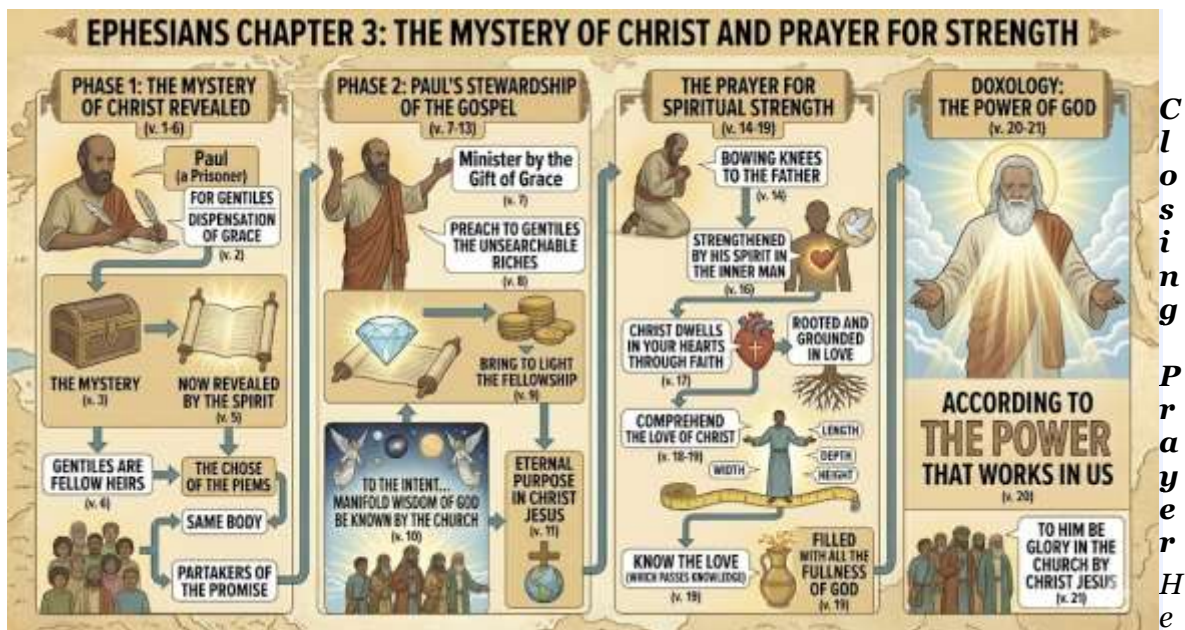
Ephesians 3 calls us to expand our asking to the full scope of God's ability -- which is, by definition, beyond our asking and our imagining.

## How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians chapter 3 speaks with sharp relevance into a contemporary church that is simultaneously over-impressed with its own programs and strategies and under-impressed with the cosmic significance of its existence. We measure the church's significance by attendance numbers, by cultural influence, by media presence, by the impressiveness of our buildings and events. Paul measures it by the watching audience of the entire spiritual universe and the display of the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

The church that knows it exists to display the wisdom of God to the cosmos does not measure itself by worldly metrics. It measures itself by the quality of its community -- by the depth of its love across human dividing lines, by the genuineness of its forgiveness, by the reality of its care for the poor and the broken, by the freedom and confidence of its access to God in prayer, by the degree to which Christ is genuinely at home in the inner lives of its members.

And the church that prays Paul's prayer -- that takes the time to kneel before the Father and ask for Spirit-empowered inner strengthening, for the fullness of Christ's indwelling, for the corporate comprehension of a love that surpasses knowledge -- is the church that is most likely to experience the doxology's promise. The power is already at work within us. The question is how large our asking is, how expansive our imagining is, and whether we are willing to trust the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all of it.



*avenly Father, we come to the end of Ephesians chapter 3 on our knees -- in posture if not always in body, at least in spirit. We have seen the mystery revealed: Jew and Gentile, co-heirs, co-body members, co-sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus. We have seen the cosmic dignity of the church: the instrument through which Your manifold wisdom is being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. We have encountered the prayer that reaches beyond knowledge: for strength in the inner being, for Christ at home in our hearts, for the comprehension of a love with no edges, for the fullness of God.*

*Lord, we confess that we have prayed too small. We have asked for circumstances when You wanted to transform inner beings. We have asked for comfort when You wanted to pour in power. We have been content with Christ visiting when You intend for Him to be at home. Forgive us. And then do what You are able to do -- immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.*

*Strengthen us in our inner beings with power through Your Spirit. Not the strength of gritted teeth and willful determination -- the strength of resurrection power applied to the hidden life of the person. Let Christ be fully at home in us -- in every room, not just the presentable ones. Tear down the interior walls we have built to keep Him out of the places we are ashamed of, and let His presence fill and transform and redeem every corner.*

*Root us deep and establish us firmly in love -- Your love that elected us before the world began, Your love that gave Your Son for our sins, Your love that sealed us with the Spirit and will not let us go. And from that foundation, give us -- together, as Your community of saints -- the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Let us know the unknowable. Let us comprehend the incomprehensible. Not because we are sufficient for it, but because You are sufficient to give it.*

*And fill us -- fill Your church -- to the measure of all Your fullness. Let the world see a community so characterized by Your presence, so marked by Your love, so shaped by Your wisdom, that the only explanation is You. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*