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EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Today we'll be looking at the last part of ***Ephesians 3***, and the last part of ***Ephesians 3*** is actually a prayer. In ***chapter 1*** Paul had lifted up a prayer to God for the Ephesians.

In **that** prayer Paul had prayed that the Ephesians would **know** the riches and power that had come to them because of their salvation. In **this** passage we have before us today, we will see Paul's prayer that the Ephesians will **use** these riches and power.

Paul actually introduced this prayer in the first verse of ***chapter 3***, and it's as though as Paul bowed his knees before the Father, he remembered he needed to tell the Ephesians a secret.

And we saw in last week's lesson that he did! Paul revealed a secret that before then God had kept to Himself.

Think about it!

God had kept this secret hidden when **He went on His walks with Adam**.
God had kept it hidden when **He talked with Abraham and called him His friend**.
God had kept it from Moses when **He gave Moses the Law**.

God had **told David many things, but not this**.

God had spoken to **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah** and to **Ezekiel** and **Daniel**, but **He had never once told these men this secret**.

He didn't tell it to the twelve minor prophets, and He kept this secret for four more hundred years after Malachi.

Dr. John Phillips puts it this way...

"Finally, God sent His Son, who was involved in the secret. Jesus dropped hints of it here and there, but He didn't give it away. The Day of Pentecost came and the church was born. Peter preached, souls were saved, and the secret was out, but still men didn't grasp it. So, God saved Saul of Tarsus, shared the secret with him, and said, "Now, Paul, you tell the world!"

And what a secret it was! God was going to create a church...a body of believers...with the Lord Jesus Christ as its Head, **and it would be made up of both Jews and Gentiles alike. No difference would be made between them.**

No longer would the Jews exclusively have **"the way"** to God.

In fact, I heard Dr. Phillips say from our own pulpit "...for 2,000 years if a Gentile wanted to know God he pretty much had to come to a Jew. For two thousand years if God had anything to say, He said it to a Jew. For two thousand years if God had anything to say, He said it in Hebrew.

But, after Pentecost, He began to speak in Greek. He began to communicate in a Gentile language. And for the last 2,000 years, if a Jew wanted to know God, he pretty much needed to come to a Gentile."

And this is true because of this mystery that Paul taught us about last week.

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Thank God for this mystery! Thank God that the secret is finally out! It may not be accepted by everyone. In fact, we know it **isn't** accepted by everyone!

The very fact of what's going on in the Middle East right now proves that it isn't accepted!

We have the Israelis over here...**they're the children of Abraham according to the promise of God!**

We have the Palestinians over here...they're the children of Abraham as well, but **not according to the promise of God, but according to the flesh.**

Both these groups believe they're right, but we know what God's Word teaches. God's covenant was with Abraham's sons according to the promise of God, through the line of **Isaac**, **not** through Abraham's sons according to Abraham's and Sarah's flesh, **Ishmael**.

By the way...let me tell you something interesting that Paul told the Galatians...

"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Galatians 3:29

We have to be very careful about claiming all things in the **Old Testament** for us, and **all** the Abrahamic Covenant does **not** apply to you and me today. The Galatians were mostly Gentile believers and Paul was telling them as he would tell you and me today if we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

That's why Christians are drawn to Israel. That's why Christians feel a kindred spirit for the Jews. They don't understand our feelings...but we know we are Abraham's offspring, too...

God told Abraham that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And it was through Abraham's seed that the Lord Jesus Christ came, wasn't it?

Having said all that, I want to say this...

Although we **should** and are **commanded** to pray for the peace of Jerusalem...

And although **we know God blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse Israel...**

And although our country **should** and hopefully our country will **continue** to support Israel...

We can also know that men and women, whether they be Arab or Jew will never come together until they become a part of this mystery...this body of the Lord Jesus Christ that regards both Jew and Gentile, both male and female, both slave and free on equal footing with each other.

This mystery...this secret that Jew and Gentile alike are included in the body of Christ is profound!

By the way, do you remember that Paul was in prison? Do you remember **why** Paul was in prison?

I mean, we all would say that Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel, and we would be right...but the Jews had to have something to have him arrested for and what Paul had been arrested for initially came from the accusation that he had taken a Gentile into the temple.

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Now, Paul hadn't done this...but as a result of these charges Paul had faced hearings before the Sanhedrin, before the Roman governor, Felix, before Felix's successor, Festus, and even before King Agrippa.

I believe it's ironic that it was because of a charge...false as it was...that Paul had brought a **Gentile** into the holy place of the Temple that was forbidden to the Gentiles....

Acts 21 tells us all about this.

This man who was supposed to have been taken into the Temple by Paul was a man named Trophimus...and he was an **Ephesian!**

And just to underscore for us how the Jews felt about the Gentiles, **Acts 22** tells us that it was when Paul made his defense before the people and told them that God had sent him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles that they said, "**Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!**"

Remember that when Jesus died the veil of the Temple had been torn in two from top to bottom...but the religious Jews still were conducting business as usual at the Temple. And they were still looking down their spiritual noses at the "Gentile dogs." And that's why this mystery we saw last week was so **disturbing** to some.

Thank God He doesn't make His plans according to a popularity poll!

Well, all that was free...

Let's look now at this prayer Paul offered to God for the Ephesians. I hope when we finish today we will have learned from Paul **a few principles of prayer.**

Paul's Posture in Prayer...verse 14...

When we read God's Word we read that there are many **different manners in which to pray.** The Bible records that some prayed while **standing**...some while sitting, some while **kneeling** and some while **falling on their faces before God.**

As we said before, the prayer of **Ephesians 1** was a prayer that these people would be enlightened by knowing the power and riches that were theirs because of their salvation. But **this** prayer...as we're going to see was not a prayer of **enlightenment** as much as it was a prayer of **enablement.**

It's one thing to **know**...it's another thing to **use** what you know!

And I believe Paul bowed his knees before the Father because of his fervent desire that God would indeed enable these folks to use what they already knew.

I don't believe God hears our prayers better when we're on our knees. I believe God knows the physical limitations of us as we grow older...I believe God looks at the position of our heart...

But I also believe that many times we as Christians can be so burdened that the only place we want to be is on our knees before God!

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So, we see here that the posture of Paul as he prayed for the Ephesians in this chapter was that he bowed his knees before the Father... Let's look next at

Paul's Petitions of Prayer...verses 15-19...

There are **four requests** in Paul's prayer...but they're not isolated from each other. One request leads into the next...

a) that they would be strengthened in the inner man...

What is the inner man? It's the "real you." So often our prayer requests focus upon our physical needs, don't they? I mean, we pray for a physical ailment, a job to meet our financial needs, traveling mercies...etc.

But, we don't need to leave out our spiritual needs. When our inner man – the real us – is strengthened, we can certainly deal with the outer man better, can't we? I mean when we're strong spiritually we can deal with physical weaknesses, whatever they are, a lot better, can't we?

And notice that Paul prays our inner man will be strengthened **according** to the riches of God's glory and through the Holy Spirit...

God doesn't give the Spirit's power to us "out of His riches", but "**according** to His riches."

If a billionaire gives you \$100.00, he would be giving you **out** of his riches. But if he gives you a million dollars, he would be giving to you **according** to his riches!

What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit empower the inner man?

Well, it means that we are controlled by God's Holy Spirit. It includes reading and studying God's Word, praying and worshiping...keeping our sins confessed...striving to walk more and amore in the Spirit and less and less in the flesh!

b) that Christ would be at home in their hearts...

Paul uses three pictures here to convey this idea...

- "**to dwell**" means "**to settle down and feel at home...**"

This is a picture not of a surface relationship, but of an ever deepening relationship.

Don't you go to some folks' home and you feel right at home? And you go in some folks' home and you don't? Maybe you've been invited to both, but you only feel "at home" in one. I love it when folks come to our home and they want to put their feet up. I love it when folks say our home is comfortable to them.

I want Christ to really feel at home in my heart, don't you? I believe Paul is teaching that Jesus can be in a person's life, but not feel at home there. Maybe sin and disobedience have broken the fellowship between the believer and the Savior.

Remember when the Lord came with two angels to visit Abraham and Sarah in **Genesis 18**. I believe if you go back to that text and read it you would be convinced that Abraham and Sarah knew they were entertaining the Lord Himself. And I also believe you would see that the Lord felt **at home** with Abraham and Sarah.

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And that becomes even more meaningful when, a short time later, in **Genesis 19**, the Lord warned Lot to take his family and flee for their lives. He didn't go Himself but only sent the two angels.

Lot was a believer, but the Lord didn't feel at home in Lot's house as He did in Abraham's tent.

Mary Oates is a wonderful Bible teacher. She teaches about making every room of our house fit for Christ to dwell in... "Our Heart, His Home"

Another author says the Christian life is a house, through which Jesus goes from room to room.

For example...

The bookshelves, which are the mind, must be cleansed from all sorts of trash and worthless things and replaced with His Word.

The dining room is our appetite and it must be cleansed of our sinful desires that please only the flesh.

The living room is our place of fellowship and He wants to cleanse our fellowship from worldly companions and activities...

And this author says that Jesus goes from room to room...even to the closets where hidden sins are kept, and so on through the entire house. **Only when He has cleaned every room, closet and corner does He settle down and feel at home.**

Jesus enters the house of our hearts the moment He saves us, but He cannot live there in comfort and satisfaction until it is cleansed of sin and filled with His will. God is patient and merciful with us and He continues to love those of His children who insist on rejecting His will, but He cannot be happy or satisfied in such a heart.

He cannot be fully at home in our hearts until we by faith truly trust Him to exercise His lordship over every aspect of our lives.

And I can't leave this point without saying that it continues to be an incredibly amazing thing that Jesus even wants to dwell in my heart! May God help my heart to be a place where He is satisfied!

- rooted in love

Where does a plant get its nourishment? From its roots! And if we're to be nourished we must be rooted in love.

- grounded in love

This speaks of our foundation. And our foundation must be love.

So, Paul is praying that Christ will be at home in our hearts, that we will be rooted and grounded in love, and he also prays that

b) that they would comprehend the love of Christ...verse 17...

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Paul is praying they will be consumed with love...not **for** Christ...I mean Paul just assumes that Christians are going to have love **for** Christ. He says, "*I am praying that you will be consumed with the love Christ has for you.*"

He says, "I want you to know the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love. I want you to know the love of Christ actually surpasses our knowledge."

What is the **breadth** of the love of Christ? How wide is it? Well, we can't know the extent of it, but I can tell you this...

It's wide enough to include Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, the "good, bad and the ugly." **It's wide enough to make you and me Abraham's children of promise.**

How **high** is the love of Christ?

It's as high as heaven and I don't think we can get higher than heaven. **Verse 3** tells us God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

What's the **length** of the love of Christ?

Well, let me ask you...what does Scripture tell us about when God chose us?

I mean, did He choose you when you walked down the aisle?
Did He choose you when you sat down and filled out a card?

No, **Ephesians 1:4** tells us that He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. When was that? I don't know, but it was a long, long, long time ago!

Let's think about the **depth** of the love of Christ...

Ephesians 2:1 tells us that God stooped down to love and save us when we were **dead** in our trespasses and sins! While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!

Paul also prayed

c) that they would be filled with the fullness of God...verse 19

God wants His children to be full of **Him!**

Years ago, my son was driving his dad's car to a golf tournament. He noticed it was nearly empty and stopped to fill it up. Well, he filled the car up and paid for it, but there was one thing wrong. Brent had put gasoline into a diesel tank. And you know what? It wouldn't run! When you put gasoline in a diesel fuel tank it will not perform! It will not run!

And when a Christian has the wrong kind of "filling" he's not going to perform. He's not going to run. He's not going to walk like a Christian should. God's fullness is God's gift to us!

The true story is told of a man who had wandered away from home many years before. He got off at a Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year, he begged on the streets for a living. One day he touched a man on the shoulder and said, "Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?"

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As soon as the tramp saw the man's face he was shocked to see that it was his own father. He said, "Father, Father, do you know me?" The man threw his arms around the tramp and with tears in his eyes, he said, "Oh my son, at last I've found you! I've found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours."

Think of it! This man was a beggar. He was a tramp. He stood begging his own father for ten cents, when for 18 years his father had been looking for him to give him all that he had.

Now, that's a small picture of what God wants to do for us. His supreme goal in bringing us to Himself is to make us like Himself by filling us with Himself, with all that He is and has.

Well, we've seen **Paul's Posture in Prayer** and **Paul's Petitions of Prayer...**

Let's look at

3) Paul's Praise in Prayer

Paul closes his prayer with praise!

Do you always feel like praising? Well, I don't! But I don't always feel like I'm **able** to be filled with the fullness of God, either.

And I don't always feel like I'm **able** to have a heart that's so clean that Jesus would feel at home in it, either.

And I don't always feel like I'm **able** to be rooted and grounded in love, either.

And I'm not always aware of all the love Christ has for me...

But, here Paul praises God because

He is able

And He is able to **do all**

And He is able to **do above all**

And He is able to **do abundantly above all**

And He is able to **do exceeding abundantly above all...**

When my son put gasoline in that diesel car the car couldn't run because it was cut off from the proper source of its power.

And when we get our eyes off Jesus, and when we refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to control us and when we don't care about honoring our Heavenly Father, we're cut off from the proper source of our power and we can't do all these things Paul's just prayed for.

But, when we do what we know to do...then

He is able and is able to do all and to do above all and abundantly above all and exceeding abundantly above all than we could ever, ever, ever ask or think!

What do you need? What do you want?

God is able to do all that we ask...

No man can do that, no matter how rich, powerful, or willing he might be. What are we asking for?

...the healing of a broken heart?

...peace in the midst of storm that swirl around us?

...the restoration of a relationship?

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...salvation for our loved ones?
...help in an emergency?
...guidance in a decision?
...victory over sin?
...blessing upon our Christian service?

No matter what we ask, God is able to do it! He can take what we ask and enlarge it. He can take our thoughts and go beyond them. We can only see the here and now. He can see the there and then.

Think about Paul for example. Paul had wanted to go to Rome. He wrote to the believers in Rome about his desire to visit them and how often he had intended to come to Rome. (**Romans 1:10-13**)

But, God always seemed to hinder Paul from going to Rome.

WHY? Because He was going to do abundantly above all that Paul could ask or think. By hindering Paul, God caused him to write to the Romans, and in **writing** to them, he gave us the **Book of Romans**. Think how doctrinally poor we would be without the **Book of Romans**.

But that's not all God did! In the end He **did** send Paul to Rome...but not the way Paul expected...God sent Paul to Rome **in chains!** How could that be viewed as doing abundantly above all that Paul could ask or think?

Surely Paul never asked to go to Rome as Nero's prisoner, accused of high treason and facing the possibility of a terrible death.

But out of that imprisonment came the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon...not to mention Paul's bold witness that reached into the palace and even to the guards...

Let me tell you what Paul wrote to the Philippians.

“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well-known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”

God is able to do so much more than we give Him credit for! Only eternity will reveal how marvelously God has answered all our prayers...even when we thought that He had ignored them!

Paul ends his prayer with **“to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations now and forever. Amen.”**

I want us to see that our lives should glorify God **personally**... **“to Him be the glory...”**
and our lives should glorify God **publicly**... **“in the church and in Christ Jesus”...**
and our lives should glorify god **perpetually**... **“to all generations forever and ever.”**

**Do you know when there's glory in the church?
Not when the preacher preaches a great sermon!**

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**Not when the teacher sticks to the lesson!
Not even when the choir and soloists sing like they did Easter evening!**

There's glory in the church when you and I submit to the Holy Spirit of God so that **our inner man is strengthened** and
when our lives are cleaned up so that **Jesus will feel at home in our hearts and when we are filled with the fullness of God** and
when **we trust that God really is able** to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us!

Then we will be effective for His kingdom's work and we will be walking worthy of the mystery of Christ.

Well, how did you like this prayer of Paul? As I studied it this week, it really convicted me how lackluster and deficient my prayer life is.

I believe the most striking thing about this prayer is that Paul really did not emphasize the physical needs of the people. He emphasized the spiritual. The other thing that convicted me is the beautiful praise that Paul ends with.

Dr. John Phillips said in commenting on this last portion of Paul's prayer: "Left breathless and speechless, all

we can say is 'Praise the Lord!' Then in typical Pauline fashion, he rattled his chain and brought us back to earth again in ***Ephesians 4:1.***"