

(Eph 3:1) For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

(Eph 3:14) For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

(Eph 3:15) Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

(Eph 3:16) That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

(Eph 3:17) That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

(Eph 3:18) May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

(Eph 3:19) And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Since Paul repeated the phrase “for this cause,” let’s start by asking the obvious question, “What cause?”

Or reason.

- The reason is the argument Paul made in Chapters 1 & 2
  - In those chapters, Paul explained how believers have received immeasurable blessings from God
  - From before the foundations of the Earth, we were selected to be God’s own possession in Christ
  - we receive promises of righteousness, peace, spiritual gifts and eternal blessings

And for that reason, as a result of all that we’ve received, Paul prays that the church would come to appreciate all these things

- In v.16, the phrase strengthened with might
- In v.17, the phrase rooted and grounded in love
- In v.18, the word comprehend
- And in v.19 the words to know and to be filled
- **Back to the top for a moment, Paul begins by describing himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus**
  - The word prisoner sounds negative of course, but in the context of v.1 it conveys a distinctly positive meaning
    - While we may not like the idea of being a prisoner, the truth is that all humanity is a prisoner of someone

- We learned earlier in Chapter 2 that all humanity is born slaves to the enemy and to sin
  - We are all born into bondage to the enemy because we come into the world sharing the enemy's fallen nature
  - Therefore, we also share his condemnation, and it's impossible to escape that sentence on our own, thus we are a prisoner to our condition
- But by the grace of God, we may be born again in the nature of Christ, so that by faith in Christ we receive His spirit
  - Our new spirit is incapable of sin, because we are placed in bondage or slavery to Christ
  - As Paul says in Romans
- **(Rom 6:22)** But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
- **Frequently, the epistle writers refer to themselves as bondslaves to Christ**
- **So if you're going to be a slave, far better to serve the Living God Who loves us and grants us eternal life than to serve His enemy**
- **Paul then adds that his service to Christ was dedicated to the needs of the Gentiles**
  - Paul, an eminent Jew, was commanded by the Lord to begin the recruitment of a Gentile church
  - Paul says in 1 Timothy he was commanded by God to serve
  - Do you remember Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, as the Lord literally arrested him and enlisted him?
  - Paul is simply emphasizing his life is dedicated to the needs of his readers, therefore his prayer is sincere and heartfelt
- And then we move to v.14 where Paul begins to pray**
- It's curious that Paul thinks to mentions his prayer posture
- Paul must have included the detail of bowing to his knees to communicate something to us about prayer
- And what it communicates is that Paul approaches the Creator with reverence and submission to His power
- Notice in v.15 that Paul acknowledges the Gods authority to determine everyone's place in Heaven and on earth
- It's like the history of Creation is a giant chess board, and God has arranged every piece just as He pleases.
- **So Paul bows to his knees as he begins to offer a prayer on behalf of the saints in Ephesus**
  - Your posture is more than a matter of convenience or preference
    - It's not simply ritual
    - Your physical posture is as important as your heart attitude when you approach the Lord in prayer
    - Because one reflects the other
    - Our posture reflects how seriously we take the opportunity to speak to the Father
  - In scripture when we read of men praying – whether prophet or king, shepherd or farmer – you often see them bowing, face down, prostrate

- They were driven to the ground in recognition of their own unworthiness
- They were acknowledging the Father's supreme holiness
- Their minds and hearts were fully engaged and submitted to God in prayer, and so their posture followed suit

**So here's Paul, fully engaged in heartfelt prayer, compelled to drop to his knees by his appreciation for all the Father is and all He has done**

- And this brings us to the first of our key thoughts in v.16
  - Paul prays the Father would grant His church in Ephesus to be strengthened spiritually by God's power
  - Spiritual strength in the inner man is spiritual fortitude, spiritual maturity
  - He's describing a Christian gaining power over his or her flesh, becoming less susceptible to the enemy's schemes
  - It's power from the Spirit of God to lead us into a closer walk, one dependent on the Spirit of God and less dependent on our own desires
- For Ephesus, spiritual strength was the first order of business, since this community was prone to leaving their first love
  - They were surrounded by a rich ungodly culture so their flesh was a strong adversary
  - They needed strengthening from the power of the Holy Spirit
- If a Christian is not interested in seeking spiritual strength at the expense of the flesh, then not much more is possible for them
  - Trying to teach, guide or encourage a believer who isn't seeking spiritual strength is like trying to train a runner who won't tie his shoes
  - God is the One Who grants spiritual strength, but He grants it to those Who seek for it
  - And we should be making appeals to the Lord for increasing spiritual strength to prepare us for the rest of our journey with Him
- **That brings us to the second mile marker in Paul's prayer in v.17: being rooted and grounded in love**
  - The verse begins with the phrase "so that" indicating that should the Father grant Paul's request in v.16, then it may lead to the next step
    - The next step is that Christ would then dwell in their hearts
    - Paul was writing to believers, so these Christians already had the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them by faith
    - Therefore we know Paul was speaking of something else
  - You could translate v.17 to read "that Christ be at home in your hearts"
    - By gaining spiritual strength in our inner man, we become a place where Christ may feel at home
    - Christ can indwell every believer by His Spirit but He dwells in us when our thoughts and behaviors mirror His
    - It's the difference between Christ being in the backseat of your car or behind the wheel.

- **Paul prayed that the thoughts of Christ would become the thoughts of the church, and as a result the church would be rooted and grounded in love**
  - To be rooted in something means to find our supply in that thing
    - The roots supply the rest of the plant with everything
    - If you place a color dye in a houseplant's water, you can change the color of the entire plant
  - So what are you rooted in? Where do you go for your supply?
    - When a Christian is rooted in love, we're saying the person has tapped into the mind of Christ
    - By study of His word, by a growing spiritual strength made possible by appeals to the riches of God's mercy, by crucifying our flesh, we sink roots in Christ
    - Then as we face life's decisions, we draw from Christ's love
    - So we say the loving words, we think the loving thoughts, we do the loving things instead of what our flesh desires
  - And to be grounded refers to the foundation of a building
    - A building is grounded in the sense that it rests on something unmovable, something steady
    - So Paul prays the church in Ephesus would be grounded in love
    - That they would not be distracted, tempted, or otherwise drawn away from Christ and from His love
- **The chain of Paul's prayer is starting to make sense...can you see it?**
  - He prayed for spiritual strength by the power of the Spirit, because the church relied too much on personal strength
    - Strength of finance, position, reputation, power, influence, etc.
    - And therefore, they were prone to leave their first love, to overlook the spiritual blessings they have in Christ
    - To overlook how blessed they are already
  - And by that spiritual strength they begin to make their home a place Christ may dwell
    - They will tap into the love of Christ
    - They will be grounded on Christ's love
    - And then as a church, they become resistant to chasing after the world's pleasures and rewards over those found in Christ's love
- **And from this place of strength and steadiness, rooted in God's love, real spiritual understanding becomes possible**
  - In particular, Paul prayed that from a position of spiritual maturity, believers in Ephesus might comprehend of the love of Christ
    - The term comprehend also means to lay hold of or to seize something
    - So Paul desires the church would take hold of something they already possess, though they are overlooking because of spiritual immaturity
  - And the thing he wants them to comprehend or seize is God's love, which Paul describes by four terms

- Breadth, length, height and depth
  - The terms are intentionally vague because Paul is describing the limitless of God's love
  - Yet the four terms each have unique meaning in describing our experiencing God's love
- **First, the breadth of God's love describes its all-encompassing nature**
  - God's love is not reserved for just some kinds of people, like Jews or the pious
    - God's love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His riches are available to Jew and Gentile, kings and paupers, priests and pagans
    - God's love is broad enough for everyone
  - If the church in Ephesus could take hold of the breadth of God's love in Christ, they would see the world differently
    - And they would cease worrying about individual status or personal standing apart from their standing in Christ
    - Jewish believers would embrace Gentile believers and vice versa
    - The church would have united as a single family, and from their unity they could show the love of Christ to the entire city
- **Secondly, the length of God's love refers to His limitless reach**
  - Is someone too far for God to reach? Is someone too evil, too hardened, too unworthy?
    - No, because the length of God's love reaches as far as the ends of the earth and into the hardest of hearts
    - Remember the people of Nineveh
    - Remember Saul on the road to Damascus
    - Paul himself says in 1 Timothy that he was called as an apostle specifically to demonstrate the length God was willing to go to extend forgiveness
    - If god could reach them, He could reach anyone
  - And for the Christian, the love of God can reach us no matter how far we stray
    - No matter how completely our sin may consume us
    - Or how discouraged we may become in our walk
    - God's love reaches further, His forgiveness never runs out
    - His grace is sufficient
  - If the church in Ephesus could comprehend the length of God's love, they would have seen the unsaved in Ephesus with more compassion
    - They might have taken their commission as ambassadors for Christ more seriously
    - They would come to recognize there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who belong to Christ and those who don't (yet)
    - And even after they forgot their first love and drifted away, they might have been drawn back by God's love
- **Thirdly, the height of God's love refers to its inexhaustible and triumphant supply**

- God's love just keeps piling up, and it's always sufficient to address our deepest emotional needs, satisfying us in ways the world can't
  - In its immaturity, the church in Ephesus had turned to looking for love in all the wrong places
  - They valued good teaching but they also seemed to value the world's attention, rewards and pleasures
  - But the things the world offers just don't satisfy in the end, and they certainly can't meet our longing for contentment
- If you've ever squandered a season of your life chasing after the world's rewards, then you already know how unsatisfying the pursuit can be
  - The thrill of the shiny toy, the challenge of the new job, the excitement of the new relationship...none of them satisfy
  - Once we get past the obsession and realize it was a waste of time, we look back on that pursuit and wonder why we were so foolish
  - But unless we ground ourselves in the love of Christ, we're likely to repeat that mistake over again
- But after you've tapped into the love of Christ so that you are walking in spiritual strength, having become an imitator of Christ, then your life begins to change
  - You come to know the height of God's love
  - You can't exhaust God's love
  - You experience a joy in serving Him that surpasses anything you could find in the world
  - You find the reward of contentment
- Certainly, life won't become perfect, and we still experience disappointments and tragedies
  - But the height of God's love leaves us satisfied in Christ all the more when the world lets us down
  - When you have anchored your satisfaction in life in the love of Christ for you and His riches reserved in eternity, then you aren't rocked by life's disappointments
  - You see those afflictions as momentary and light, because the love of God given to you in Christ towers above them all
- **Finally, Paul prays we would know the depth of God's love, which refers to His unlimited mercy and supply**
  - God's power to bring us joy far surpasses the degree of sorrow the world can inflict
    - Believers walking in spiritual strength rooted in God's love still face difficulties in life
    - But by God's love we can face them with a resilience the world can't understand
    - We still have feelings...we still feel pain, or anger or resentment, at least for a moment
    - But the depths of Christ's love brings a new, mature perspective to those circumstances

- The church in Ephesus dearly needed to appreciate the depths of God's love, because the things they were chasing were going to lead to ruin
  - Historically, we know this city entered into a decades-long economic decline
  - The port harbor they depended upon for trade began to silt up and as it did, commercial trade disappeared
  - This city of wealth became a city of ruin, but what of the Christians in the city who chased for the wealth the city offered?
  - Where would they be once the city crumbled?
- If they could set a foundation of Christ's love, then nothing could shake them
  - Their joy wouldn't depend on economic trends or commercial success
  - They might know the fullness of God

### **Notice Paul ends v.19 praying for that outcome**

- He prays the church could be filled with the fullness of God
  - He asks that the church might find its complete satisfaction in the full mercy, grace and peace that comes from an abiding walk with the Lord
  - Does the thought of such contentment seem out of reach to you?
  - Does it sound like religious speak? Like fairytale?

Perhaps you're listening to the Bible study this evening, yet you're doubting that such a life of contentment is possible for you.

- - - If so, then you haven't been listening
    - You're thinking that God's love has limits
    - You've forgotten that it has no limit in breadth, length, height and depth
    - You're assuming that you have to work hard to obtain what God freely gives to those who rest in Him
- **And Paul seemed to know you and I might have such doubts, because he ends his letter with a strong encouragement for us to pray this same prayer ourselves**
- **(Eph 3:20)** Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
- **(Eph 3:21)** Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

- - We noted how the chapter was a prayer interrupted by a mystery
    - In the prayer, Paul asked the Lord to grant the church spiritual power

- So they might comprehend the love of Christ
  - That they might be rooted and grounded in that love
  - So they may be content and filled with the fullness of God
- But almost from the start, Paul suspended his prayer to explain an important mystery of the church
  - The mystery and the prayer were connected as we'll see today
  - Essentially, Paul was praying for unity in the body, a bond of love between Jew and Gentile
  - And the mystery he explained relates to that union
- **Let's start back again at the beginning of the chapter in v.1**
- **(Eph 3:1)** For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
- **(Eph 3:2)** If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
- **(Eph 3:3)** How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
- **(Eph 3:4)** Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
- **(Eph 3:5)** Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

**So Paul wanted to address the problem of division in the church, which he does in four parts**

- **The first part we studied earlier in Chapter 2, while the second and third parts we're studying now are in Chapter 3, and the final part comes in Chapter 4**
  - **In Chapter 2, Paul acknowledged that the Gentiles were once far off**
  - **Yes, God did intend division between Jew and Gentile for a time**
  - **But that time has passed**
  - **Today in Christ God has brought the two together into one body, Paul explained**
- **The second part is found here in Chapter 3, as Paul prayed for the church to comprehend the all-encompassing power of God's love**
  - **In particular, the Jews in the church had to understand that God's love was capable of embracing the Gentiles...**
  - **...a group of people the Jews had written off as "unlovable"**
  - **Similarly, the Gentiles who now enjoy the love of God couldn't turn their backs on disobedient Israel**
  - **The Lord hadn't forsaken His people, so Gentiles must not become arrogant against the nation of Israel**
- **Specifically, the Lord revealed to Paul that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body of God's people**
  - **Jews had long held this position of privilege and had been promised many good things by God**



- They had promise of a Deliverer to lead them out of sin and into everlasting righteousness
    - They had promise of an inheritance in a Kingdom where they enjoy peace and security
    - They had promise of an abiding relationship with their God
  - The Jews received these promises by God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
    - The Jewish people did nothing to deserve nor earn these things
    - In fact, they weren't even a people until God Himself made them out of Abraham's barren wife
    - And because the Jewish people were descended from Abraham, they were heirs to these promises
  - An heir is typically a family member, and so they receive an inheritance because they have a relationship with the one who died
    - When the Son of God died, He delivered an inheritance to God's people
    - This inheritance was promised to those Jews who were in the family of God by faith
- **Now Paul reveals to the world that God desired for Gentiles to be fellow heirs of these promises with the Jewish people**
  - God intended the Gentiles to be fellow partakers in the promises given to Israel
    - How did these strangers become fellow heirs?
    - How did they obtain that opportunity?
  - Paul says at the end of v.6 that they obtained it through the Gospel
    - The Death, Burial, and resurrection.

(Act 13:44) And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

(Act 13:45) But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

(Act 13:46) Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

(Act 13:47) For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

(Act 13:48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

(Act 13:49) And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

## **Furthermore, Paul says in v.7 that he was God's chosen minister of this Gospel by the power of God**

- The Greek word for minister means deacon, which is an office of service to God
  - Paul served God in bringing this message to the world
  - Paul didn't invent this idea
  - He worked this plan because he was entrusted with the plan by God
- - Paul says in vs.8-9 he was the very least of the saints, and certainly many in the early church would have agreed with Paul's assessment
    - He's referring to his past of persecuting Christians
    - If opportunities to serve God were based on merit, Paul would have been the last person qualified to serve God
    - But then so would we
  - We all serve in our own way according to the same terms
    - We serve God because he entrusts some work of service to Him
    - We serve despite our disqualification
    - And we serve in His power so that everything we accomplish is credit to Him
- **And this is why Paul's personal history was so important to His work in the church, and particularly to this mystery**
  - Paul was the last person you would expect to encourage inviting Gentiles to come to God
    - Paul's unlikely conversion story disarmed his critics, because they couldn't claim Paul had been a lifelong Gentile sympathizer
    - Everyone knew Paul hated Gentiles, or so he used to
    - Therefore, his sudden affection for Gentiles could only be explained supernaturally
  - So Paul says in v.9 that he brought to light the plan of this mystery which had been hidden for past ages
    - For centuries and millennia the Lord held back this truth
    - Generations of Gentiles came and went without opportunity to know God
    - Then the Lord appeared and then the mystery was revealed
- **Why did God chose to reveal this truth in this way? And why wait until Jesus' appearing before uniting the two peoples?**
  - Paul gives the answer in v.10

(Eph 3:10) To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

(Eph 3:11) According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

(Eph 3:12) In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

- **Paul says this mystery was hidden for ages to be revealed by the apostles so that God's manifold wisdom would be made known**
  - The word manifold means diverse, multifaceted, made up of many kinds
  - Paul's talking about the intricacies of God's work
  - The incredible details and unexpected twists and turns of how God shuts up all people in disobedience yet brings salvation to many
  - The unfathomable depths of his wisdom that brings all events in human history together culminating in the work of His church
- Paul says in v.11 that all these things were in accordance with the eternal purpose He carried out in Jesus Christ
  - From the beginning of Creation, the plan of God centered on Jesus dying to redeem humanity from sin
  - That plan existed before sin existed
  - And therefore, the plan of a Church uniting Jew and Gentile existed before either Jew or Gentile existed
- That's why both Jew and Gentile can have boldness and confident access to the Father through Jesus Christ
  - Because after all, if God planned all this for our sake from so long ago, why be timid? Why doubt?
  - Instead, we should celebrate our place in the family of God
  - We should live as children of the King, secure in our place in His family, determined to serve Him and enjoying access to His wisdom and power
  - And we should unite with others who share those same privileges
- **But Paul says God was working this plan for another audience beyond you and me**
  - Did you notice at the end of v.10 that Paul made mention of another group of observers?
    - He says that God wanted to make known his multifaceted wisdom to rulers and authorities in the high or heavenly places
    - Who are these rulers in heavenly places?
  - At first, we might think angels
    - But this doesn't make a lot of sense
    - Because angels need not be taught of God's wisdom or even his plan
    - Certainly God's wisdom is self-evident to the angels
- **So what other heavenly rulers need to be taught the wisdom of God?**
  - Consider another verse from this same letter
    - Because angels need not be taught of God's wisdom or even his plan
    - They are spirits created to minister to the needs of the saints, including the Gentiles
    - Certainly God's wisdom is self-evident to the angels
- **So what other heavenly rulers need to be taught the wisdom of God?**
  - Consider another verse from this same letter

**(Eph 6:12) For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.**

- **In this verse Paul is clearly speaking about unholy forces**
- **He calls them wicked and darkness**
- **Yet notice he also refers to them as rulers, as authorities in heavenly places**
  - **All three of these words are the same ones Paul uses in here in v.10**
  - **These are the demonic forces that inhabit the spiritual world and war against God and God's people**
- **Remember, the enemy fell into sin because in his beauty and pride he thought himself a rival for God's throne**
  - **Somehow he imagined he could compete with God and even exceed Him in power and wisdom**
  - **In Revelation 12, we learn that Satan recruited a third of the angelic realm to follow him into rebellion against God**
- **These are the rulers, the authorities in heavenly places**
  - **They are not ultimate rulers, they do not have ultimate authority**
  - **But they possess authority for a time**
  - **And they are an audience for this amazing work of God**
- **Here's the message I think God wanted to send to those rebellious angels through His mystery of the church**
  - **That God's wisdom and power is far beyond anything they could comprehend**
    - **That God could work for so long, through so many people and nations to accomplish His plan**
    - **That every detail would come together in the end**
    - **That promises made so long ago would still come to pass in time**
    - **That people seemingly beyond reach were yet found**
  - **And that nothing the enemy might try would change even one detail**
- - The mystery of the church is God's triumphant statement to spiritual darkness: Game Over!
    - You lost, and your proof is that the Gospel is reaching to the ends of the earth
    - Not only are Jews being saved, but so are Gentiles
    - And not only did Christ live again, but so will all these
- **But fallen angels have only one future**
  - As the writer of Hebrews says
- **(Heb 2:16) For verily he took not on *him* the nature of angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham.**
- **They are destined for destruction for there is no promise of salvation for them**
- **They know this, and the existence of the Church simply stands as testimony that God could have saved them...but chose not to**

- **So these fallen angels see the Church as proof they have been passed over in God's mercy, and so they hate God all the more**
  - Which is why Paul ends this passage in v.13
- **(Eph 3:13)** Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.
- **The demons take out their hatred for God on God's people, including Paul**
- **And so Paul says his tribulations are simply proof of the glory God has brought to Gentiles like you and me**
- **(Rom 11:33)** O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!