

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST  
Ephesians 3:1-7

Intro: One word which ought to attract the attention of every Christian as he reads the NT is the word, "mystery." We have already run across it in chapter 1, verse 9. We have it twice in our text for today: vv. 3, 4. We see it again in verse 9 of this chapter. It is used in 5:32, and then finally in 6:19. This makes a total of 6 times that Paul used it in this Epistle.

In other books of the NT it is used a total of 22 times, making a sum total of 28 times. It is found one time each in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not at all in John. It is used 2 times in Romans, 6 times in 1 Corinthians, 4 times in Colossians, 1 time in 2 Thessalonians, 2 times in 2 Timothy, and 4 times in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

If we were to go to an English dictionary to look up the word, mystery, we would find something like this:

Something that has not been, or cannot be, explained; hence, something beyond human comprehension (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition, p. 660).

It is also defined as "an enigma," which is "an obscure saying," or "anything inexplicable" (Op. cit., p. 331), which means that it cannot be explained.

That does not help us very much because that would mean, then, that the Apostle Paul was writing about something that he could not really explain to the Ephesians, and which they could not understand if he did explain it.

But let us not give up yet.

If we look into the background of this word, we find that it was used to describe certain rites, or practices, or doctrines, which were characteristic of religious groups, and which only the members of that group had access to. We hear the word used today of lodges, and only members of a particular lodge can know the mysteries of that lodge. So, in that case, the word mean, a secret, or secrets.

We often hear this word used to describe a certain kind of novel, for example, a Sherlock Holmes' mystery. In this case it would mean something that is difficult to resolve, but it can, under the right kind of investigation, be figured out.

Now we can draw from all of these definitions to find out what it means in the NT.

Paul has actually defined it for us in our text for today. Look with me at the first part of verse 3, and then verse 5.

Skip the parenthesis. (Read.)

This allows us to come to a definition of the way the word "mystery" is used in the NT:

IT IS A SECRET WHICH GOD HAD PREVIOUSLY KEPT TO HIMSELF,  
BUT NOW AT LAST "REVEALED UNTO HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND  
PROPHETS BY THE SPIRIT."

Romans 16:25b, 26 says the same thing:

. . . according to the revelation of the mystery,  
which was kept secret since the world began,  
but now is made manifest,  
and by the scriptures of the prophets,  
according to the commandment of the everlasting God,  
made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

Notice carefully that Paul said about "the mystery" that it "was kept secret since the world began." This is not something that God decided upon when Christ came, nor just before He came, nor after He came. But this was God's plan from the very beginning! God does not do what we do--make up His mind as time goes on. He knew before the creation of the heavens and the earth what His plan was throughout all of time, and even after time would no longer be.

In Colossians 1:25 we have this definition of "a mystery."

Again, it is Paul who was writing, and he said,

Whereof I am made a minister,  
according to the dispensation of God  
which is given to me for you,  
to fulfil the word of God;  
Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages  
and from generations,  
but it now made manifest to his saints.

So, it is truth which God had previously not made known, but now it is made known. It is not possible to understand it just by man's ability to acquire knowledge. Just as it was revealed to Paul and to the other apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit, so it must be made known to the people of God by the same Holy Spirit. It is like all of Scripture: it cannot be understood by man's mental abilities unless the Holy Spirit is their Teacher.

If you were here last week, I hope you remember what I said about the words, "Now therefore," in Eph. 2:19. In case you do not, I will refresh your memory. I said that these words in the original language mean that Paul had reached the point that he had in mind when he started to write this Epistle. I SAY THE SAME THING ABOUT THE WAY THAT PAUL BEGAN CHAPTER 3. Remember that there were no chapter and verse divisions in the Greek manuscripts, and so we can say that Eph. 3:1 really

continues what Paul was saying in Eph. 2:22. AND THAT SPECIAL POINT THAT PAUL MADE IN EPH. 2:19 IS AGAIN MADE IN EPH. 3:1, WITH THE WORDS, "FOR THIS CAUSE I PAUL . . ."

Paul was indicating a couple of very important truths in this passage:

- 1) That God's revelation which we have in Scripture is progressive. The NT is built upon the foundation of the OT, but God was continually adding to His revelation things which He had not made known before. Truth previously not revealed was called a mystery. But having been revealed, God wanted it to be understood and believed and acted upon by His people.
- 2) That God's revelation of the Bible is a revelation by the Holy Spirit, and, along with this, the fact that we cannot understand this revelation without the help of the Holy Spirit Who gave it to the writers of Scripture.

But now let us look more closely at the text. Let us, first of all, notice:

I. PAUL'S SELF-INTRODUCTION (Eph. 3:1, 2, 7).

How did he speak of himself here?

A. "I Paul" (v. 1).

He was certainly showing his personal concern about this truth, and the importance of it, but he was also indicating that this was indeed the very revelation of God. He was speaking with apostolic authority.

B. "The prisoner of Jesus Christ" (v. 1).

I like the way Dr. Salmond explained this in the Expositor's Greek Testament. He said that this probably means that Jesus Christ was the originating cause of his imprisonment. Paul had seen the hand of the Lord in his imprisonment. It was not an accident. It was not just because his enemies were more powerful than he was. It was the Lord's plan for him.

And this led to the next thing that he said:

C. "For you Gentiles" (v.1).

Paul was strengthened and blessed by his imprisonment, so that he profited from it. But his imprisonment was for them! It was because of his message involving them, and it was for their benefit.

Paul said much the same thing in verse 2. (Read.) A "dispensation" is actually an arrangement, a plan of God. So in the sense in which he used it in verse 2, we could say that it is used as a synonym for the word, "mystery."

This is why we can speak of this present age as the dispensation of the grace of God. It is not because God did not deal in grace until this revelation was given. Grace was exercised toward Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Grace was exercised toward Cain. Grace was exercised for 400 years plus with the Canaanite nations after the call of Abraham. Grace was shown toward the Israelites again and again while they were living under the Law. David experienced the grace of God. Salvation has always been by grace. God has always been the God of grace. But the grace of God was put on display, so to speak, when God did, after the death of Christ, what He did with the Gentiles, as we are learning here in this Book of Ephesians, and as I will point out more specifically in just a moment.

But before I do that, notice one more way in which Paul identified himself in this passage. I am referring to what he said in verse 7:

D. "A minister" (v. 7).

"Was made" means became. "A minister" is actually is a subordinate, one who serves a master, one who actively does the will of his master. This was his calling. This was his appointment from God. Before Paul was saved, a ministry to the Gentiles would have been the worst possible task he could have had. But the Lord had changed his heart, and now he took great delight in his ministry to the Gentiles.

At the same time he recognized that this was all due to "the effectual working of his power." God had pursued him. God had changed him. He wrote to the Ephesians as one who had come under the mighty influence of divine omnipotence.

But now let us look for the rest of our time at:

II. PAUL'S MESSAGE (Eph. 3:3-6).

We have already seen that he called it "the mystery," or "the mystery of Christ."

A. How did he get it?

God made it known to him "by revelation." But what does this mean? How should we explain this?

This is how we got all of our Bible. Genesis was given "by revelation." So was Exodus, etc. So was Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, etc. So was Ephesians. God was making known truths which could not be known by man in any other way. Paul was very brilliant, but it was not his brilliance that enabled him to write about "the mystery." Paul knew a lot about the OT, but it was not his knowledge that enabled him to write about "the mystery." In ways which we do not understand, God made known through the Holy Spirit the truth of this mystery, so that what Paul wrote was the very Word of God. God made known the truth to him, and then so directed him in his writing that he was guided by God in very words that he used.

See verse 3.

B. What was his message? What was "the mystery"?

Read verse 6.

Perhaps, time-wise, the three statements that are made here are given in their reverse order. All three are prefaced with the words, "That the Gentiles should be . . .":

- 1) "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs."
- 2) "That the Gentiles should be . . . of the same body."
- 3) "That the Gentiles should be . . . partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."

Let me take them in their reverse order.

1. "That the Gentiles should be . . . partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."

It means that the Gentiles would share equally with the Jews in the Gospel of the grace of God.

This means two things in particular:

- a. That the same Gospel by which the Jew is saved, saves the Gentile. God does not have one way to save the Jew, and a different, harder way to save the Gentile. They are both saved by Christ, and Christ alone. Christ died for Jews and Gentiles.
- b. That the Gentile gets all of the very same

blessings in salvation that the Jew gets. What Paul wrote in Eph. 1:3 applies just as much to the Gentile as to the Jew. The Jew does not get more than the Gentile; the Gentile does not get more than the Jew.

They partake equally in the blessings bought for the people of God by the death of Christ.

2. "That the Gentiles should be . . . of the same body."

What is this "body" that Paul was speaking about?

He mentioned it in Eph. 1:22, 23. He mentioned it again in Eph. 2:16. Cf. Eph. 4:4, 12, 16 (2x), 5:23, (29), 30. It is the Church. Remember: This was "the mystery." Believers are so united to Christ that they are members of His body. We have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into this body, according to 1 Cor. 12:13.

Saved Gentiles have the same relationship to Christ that same Jews do. We are fellow-members of His body. He only has one body. And so we all are partakers in that "one body."

We will learn more about this as we go along through this Epistle. This was Paul's purpose in writing--to show how we are saved, and the unique place that God has given to all of us in Christ.

3. "That the Gentiles should be . . . fellowheirs."

This is the only time this word, "fellowheirs," is found in the NT.

We spent some time thinking about our inheritance when we were back in Eph. 1:11, 12. And we learned that as part of our inheritance is that we will be conformed to the very likeness of Christ. We will be like He is. The Jew can claim that inheritance, but so can the Gentile. The Jew has no more nor no less than the Gentile. The Gentile has exactly the same inheritance as the Jew. And none of us deserves as part of it--likeness to Christ, heaven, or anything connected with it--except in and through and because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: What are we to say about these things? What should be our response to such great truth?

Several things need to be said.

First, let us make sure that we understand what this "mystery" is. Read it over, and pray over it, until the truth of it really delights your soul.

Second, let this tend to unite us as the people of God. The reason the Jews despised the Gentiles, and the Gentiles were inclined to despise the Jews, was because the one did not believe that the other was as worthy of God's blessings in salvation. But the truth is, neither of us is worthy. It takes the same kind of grace and just as much grace for God to save the Gentile as the Jew, and vice versa. If the Lord gave us what we deserve, we all would be lost forever.

Third, let us praise God for His grace, and that He has so united us together in the body of Christ.

Finally, let us thank the Lord for those whom God used to open our eyes and ears and hearts to this truth, as Paul did for the Ephesians, and for so many others.

And let us pray that the Lord will use us to open the eyes of others to this great truth. The Church today is so fragmented that we could never believe in the oneness of Christ's body if we did not know that the ultimate outcome were in the hands of the Lord. Some day He will present us faultless, and then, as never in this life, will we know what a marvelous work the Lord has done to make us a part of His body!

A FAR-REACHING MINISTRY  
Ephesians 3:8-13

Intro: The first thirteen verses of Ephesians 3 are verses where Paul was very personal. Some commentators have looked upon this passage as a digression, but, in my opinion, it is anything but a departure from what he had already written. Paul was here explaining his part in the great work of God in this age. And, like all of those true servants of God who preceded him in the ministry, he felt most unworthy of the place that God had given to him, and of the message he had been called to preach, and sent to preach.

In these days when the ministry has fallen into disrepute in the eyes of the world, it is most refreshing, and most necessary, to have Paul's remarks concerning his own ministry, and to see how unworthy he felt about having any part in the work of the Lord in his day. It was his life, and he carried it out in the full consciousness that this was his God-given mission in the world.

So what I am saying is that verses 1 through 13 actually form one section. I am taking them up on two Sundays because there is so much here that we could not cover it all in the time we have in one service.

So let us look, first of all, at:

I. PAUL, THE MINISTER (Eph. 3:7a).

Here we see nothing but the greatest sense of unworthiness. "Unto me" is not a statement of pride, but of amazement! It is as though even then he had trouble in believing that God had given him such a place in life. It was like he said, "Unto me, even to me, I who had been a hater of Christ, a hater of the Church, even to me, has this grace been given!"

He claimed to be a saint, one who truly belonged to the Lord, but he felt that he belonged at the bottom of the list of saints: "Less than the least of all saints." He felt that he was lower than the lowest. He felt about himself like Jacob felt about himself: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou has shewed unto thy servant" (Gen. 32:10a). It is one thing to say words like this, but it is another thing to sense our unworthiness in the depths of our souls. That is where Paul felt it because, remember that he was speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly the Apostle Paul had come to a realization of this fact more so during his time in his confinement than he had ever realized it before.



Have you ever felt that way in your heart? Humility is not very admired even among believers in these days, but twice in the Book of Proverbs it is recorded that Solomon said, "Before honor is humility" (Prov. 15:33b; 18:12). If we are looking for keys to the blessing of God upon Paul's ministry, we must not overlook the condition of his heart which led him to say that he was "less than the least of all saints." This meant that he felt that every other child of God was better than he, and more worthy of the blessing of God, more worthy to be used by God.

At the same time Paul was writing to the Philippians,  
 Let nothing be done through strife of vainglory;  
 but in lowliness of mind  
 let each esteem other better than themselves  
 (Phil. 2:3).

But notice a second point:

## II. THE SPHERE OF HIS MINISTRY (Eph. 3:8-10).

My subject this morning is, A FAR-REACHING MINISTRY. One thing that I had in mind was that it was FAR-REACHING as far as those who were included in it were concerned. Paul mentioned the sphere of his ministry in a threefold way in these verses. You have one in v. 8, another in verse 9, and a third in verse 10.

### A. Verse 8 -- "among the Gentiles."

Paul not only felt unworthy to preach the message that had been given to him, but he felt unworthy to preach it to the Gentiles! For a Jew to say such a thing as this certainly was evidence that God had done a tremendous work in his heart. When he said that he was "less than the least of all saints," he had to mean Gentile saints as well as other Jewish saints!

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. Here was a Hebrew Christian who was commissioned by God to carry the Word of God to Gentiles, and he reveled in it, although he felt that anyone else could do a better job than he could.

### B. Verse 9 -- "all men."

This throws added light upon his ministry to the Gentiles.

"All men" often means all kinds of men. And that is the case here. There were all kinds of Gentiles.

There were good Gentiles, and there were bad Gentiles. There were educated Gentiles, and there were uneducated Gentiles. There were male Gentiles, and there were female Gentiles. There were young Gentiles, and there were older Gentiles. There were Roman Gentiles, and there were Greek Gentiles. There were Egyptian Gentiles, and there were Arabian Gentiles. All were to hear Paul's message, and God had His people among them all. So you can begin to see from this the scope of the ministry that the Lord had given to Paul.

But this was not all. At this point I want you to get ready for what I think will be one of the greatest surprises of your life--if you have never seen this before.

Paul had a ministry . . .

- C. "Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places."

Who are they?

They are angelic beings. They can be the good, the elect, angels, or they can be the bad, the fallen, angels. It seems best to take it that Paul was speaking here of the elect angels.

Notice that Paul used the word, "now." He meant, now at last! God had not only reserved the revelation of the mystery until "now," but it was only "now," after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, that angels could be fully instructed as to what God had purposed from the beginning to accomplish by His grace.

The word "principality" was used in 1:21. We have it again in 6:12. There it is used of evil "principalities." They are the chief leaders, those with the highest positions, among the angels.

"Powers" are authorities. It speaks of the powers which have been delegated to the heavenly beings. Paul was not necessarily referring to two groups here because those chief leaders among the angels served with great authority. What he seems to be saying here was that he had a ministry, by the grace of God, to angelic beings of the highest position and with the greatest authority. By this he meant that the greatest among the angels were being instructed through God's work in His people, drawing them

together in the Church--instructed in "the manifold wisdom of God."

We have no reason to think that that ministry to angels has even now come to an end. It continues right down to the present hour, and will continue, until the Church is completed and taken to heaven.

Can you think of anything more FAR-REACHING than this? The ministry of the Church not only is world-wide in its scope, but it reaches into the heavens as well! What that ministry is, we are about to see.

### III. THE MESSAGE (Eph. 3:8-10).

This, too, is expressed in a threefold way. Let us go back to the same three verses: 8, 9, and 10.

All three of the following expressions point to the same message, the same work of God, but it is expressed in three ways so that we will see more of the glory of it. It is like holding a diamond in our fingers, and looking at it from three different directions.

#### A. "The unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8).

We have had riches spoken of before in this Epistle. Cf. 1:7, 18; 2:4, 7. So, when Paul relates it here to "Christ," he must be thinking of:

- 1) The riches of God's mercy and grace and glory which are manifested in our salvation, first of all.
- 2) Those same riches demonstrated in what God does in bringing His people together and uniting them to Christ and to each other in the Church, the Body of Christ.

When you see sinners as they are (which angels can do), and then see what God has done for them in Christ, you cannot mark out that path. It is "unsearchable." There is no rational explanation for the grace of God, or for the mercy of God, or for the glory of God, in the lives of sinners who have been saved. It is beyond all comprehension. If it does not appear to us to be amazing grace, it is either because we do not understand the sinfulness of man's heart, or the grace of God.

#### B. "The fellowship of the mystery" (v. 9).

Paul's job, the minister's job, the job facing the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is that of getting

spiritually blinded people to see! We are to illuminate them by flooding them with light greater than the light of the sun.

"Fellowship" here is the word in the original which was translated, "dispensation," in v. 2. It speaks of a plan, an arrangement, which God had had in mind "from the beginning of the world."

So, if it is impossible to track out the "riches of Christ" in salvation, so it is equally impossible to comprehend fully what God has done in uniting "all men" who are in Christ, to Christ, and in just one body--not a different body for every nationality, or generation, but "one body" from the first days of the Church until now.

And then we come to the third expression:

C. "The manifold wisdom of God" (v. 10).

If the truth of salvation, and the truth of the Church, the Body of Christ, required divine wisdom, what do you think of the carrying out of those purposes? Bishop Moule wrote in his commentary on Ephesians that God in His wisdom "is never at a loss to carry out its purposes of grace, be the problems presented by its subject what they may" (p. 117).

Think of what God had to do to save us? Think of what it took to bring you to Christ. Think of what it has taken to keep you, and is still taking to perfect you. Think of God's work with His Church, uniting us to Christ, then unifying the members, and ultimately completing all that He has planned to do. How would you like to have His job? How many times even with regard to yourself have you come to your wit's end? But God is never at a loss to know what to do. He is never baffled by the problems which His people create, or in which they are involved. He has all of the wisdom needed to perfect every saint, and to complete His work in His Church so that it will eventually be all that He intended for it to be.

Angels are learning about "the manifold wisdom of God" from the way He is working with and in and for His people! Are we learning anything about it? When the work is finished, God alone will get the glory!

But now we must consider:

IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS MINISTRY (Eph. 3:11, 12).

Two things can be said about this. It is important because:

- A. It is "according to the eternal purpose which he (God) purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 11).

Actually there are two things of importance in this verse

1. It is important because it is a plan made by God in eternity past. If God made it, it has to be fulfilled. And if God made it, it has to be of supreme importance.
2. But it is also important because Jesus Christ is involved in it. Salvation is by Christ; the Church is Christ's Body.

But, in addition to these facts in v. 11, notice what we have in v. 12:

- B. It is only by this plan that we have any sure access to God Himself--through faith in Christ (v. 12).

If God had not made this plan, and if He were not seeing that it is carried out in every detail, we would be utterly without hope. But such a great plan makes every trial, every obstacle, well-worth the trouble that it may be.

One final word:

V. A WORD OF COMFORT ABOUT THE MINISTRY (Eph. 3:13).

It is easy to think of the ministry as a work where the message is proclaimed, sinners are saved, and saints are edified. But it is not as simple as that! We are engaged in a spiritual warfare. We are called upon to preach a message to people who do not want to hear what we have to say. Often preaching has turned to bloodshed. Preaching carries with it its disappointments. People respond, and many turn away. The people of God are often unresponsive. They carry with them the same problems they have always had. If the ministry had been dependent upon people, it would have ended long ago. But, thank God, it continues, and will continue, until every detail of God's plan has been accomplished and completed.

Therefore, Paul said in verse 13, in so many words, "Please do not lose heart and quit because of the trouble I am having. We are on the winning side. God is with us, and He cannot fail. So, though the battle is long

and severe, and the disappointments many, stay by the stuff, and persevere to the end. Not even death itself can put an end to the work of the Lord.

Concl; Do you remember the story in 2 Kings 6 of how the King of Syria came to war against the Israelites, and the Lord delivered Israel time and time again. The King of Syria could not understand what was going on until one of his servants told him that Elisha was telling the King of Israel what the King of Syria was going to do, and so the King of Israel was able to escape with his men.

So the King of Syria set out to kill Elisha. This made Elisha's servant afraid, especially when he saw the Syrian army coming, "a great host," with all their horses and chariots. But Elisha said to him,

Fear not: for they that we with us  
are more than they that be with them (2 Kings 6:16).

And having said that, Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of the young man. And the Word says that

. . . he saw: and, behold, the mountain was  
full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha  
(2 Kings 6:17b).

That is what I have been praying that the Lord would do for all of us today: OPEN OUR EYES! The work of bringing people to Christ is not easy. The work of the Lord is never easy. We face enmity from the world, the flesh, and the Devil. But, as great as the opposition may be, "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." We are on God's side. This is His work. He has been planning for all eternity to do what He intends to do, and is doing with us. So let us not faint, but continue on, trusting Him to meet the problems that we have in our individual lives, and trusting Him to remove the obstacles that stand in our way as a Church. God has never lost a battle, and He will surely win the war.

STRENGTHENED BY THE SPIRIT  
Ephesians 3:14-16

Intro: We come today to the second prayer which Paul recorded for us in this Epistle. The first one is in chapter 1, verses 15-23.

Both prayers are mentioned in relation to the truth which Paul had been writing about. That is the reason we have the word, "Wherefore," in 1:15, and that is the reason we have, "For this cause," in 3:14.

In both prayers we have the Three Persons of the Godhead very prominent. (Point this out.)

It should be noted, also, that both prayers were offered for the people of God, not for the world. And both prayers had to do with the power of God. In fact, the prayer which we are about to consider in Ephesians 3 is actually followed by another prayer in verses 20, 21, a prayer of worship, and the emphasis there is upon the power of God. (Quote.)

FIRST PRAYER - CONCERNED W/OUR IGNORANCE; SECOND, W/OUR WEAKNESS.

When we consider the historical references to the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts, and the messages found in his Epistles, it is very apparent that prayer had a large place in the life of Paul, and that he gave much time to praying for others.

Today I just want to take up with you verses 14, 15, and 16. This will take us through Paul's first request. And this is it:

That he would grant you,  
according to the riches of his glory,  
to be strengthened with might by his Spirit  
in the inner man.

But before we get to that, let us look at verses 14 and 15.

Here we see:

I. THE REASON FOR HIS PRAYER (Eph. 3:14a).

People, people who claim to be the people of God, will often say that the knowledge of the sovereign purposes of God discourages prayer. Their idea is that, if God has ordained that certain things shall be, then there is no

need to pray about them. BUT PAUL DID NOT FEEL THAT WAY. NOR DID HE FIND THAT THE TRUTH OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD PRODUCED THAT REACTION IN HIS HEART. IN FACT, IT WAS JUST THE OPPOSITE: IT WAS THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH THAT MOVED HIS HEART TO PRAY.

People can claim to know a lot about the truth, but that does not mean that they actually know it as Paul was praying they would know it. They are often the ones who speak the loudest against the power of the truth of the Word of God. But those who really have had their eyes opened to the truth of the sovereignty of God know that the truth is the most powerful force in turning our hearts to God in prayer. It is in know the certainty of the promises of God, and the purposes of God, that we have the greatest boldness in coming to the Lord in prayer.

And when Paul said, "For this cause . . . ," he was indicating that he had not only been moved to pray by the truth he had been writing about, but it also indicates that he believed his prayers were a vital part of seeing the purposes of God fulfilled. Prayer is not just a meaningless habit for us to get into, repeating words that do not count for anything; it is a mighty force, ordained of God, for the accomplishing of His purposes. And so it can be said that prayer is very important to God, and it is important to those for whom we pray.

Notice secondly,

## II. PAUL'S POSTURE IN PRAYER (Eph. 3:14m).

He said, "I bow my knees."

This does not mean that Paul always prayed kneeling. He must have prayed as he walked from town to town. He probably prayed many times after lying down in his bed at night. But probably, most of the time, when circumstances permitted it, he would kneel to pray.

There is much in the Bible about kneeling to pray. This does not mean that we have to pray this way, but it is important for us to see how much it was practiced in the Scriptures, and then we may begin to feel that it is important for us, too.

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of that first temple, he kneeled before his people, and prayed.

2 Chron. 6:13 says this:

For Solomon had made a brasen scaffold,  
of five cubits broad, and three cubits high,  
and had set it in the midst of the court:  
and upon it he stood,  
and kneeled down upon his knees  
before all of the congregation of Israel,  
and spread forth his hand toward heaven,



and then he prayed.

Spanning the history of Israel to the time we many of the people returned from captivity, Ezra was lamenting the return of the people to idolatry, and so we read these words:

And at the evening sacrifice I arose up  
from my heaviness;  
and having rent my garment and my mantle,  
I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands  
unto the Lord my God,  
and then he prayed.

In Psalm 95:6 we have the Psalmist saying this:  
O come, let us worship and bow down:  
let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

Isaiah made this prediction, and it was quoted by Paul in Rom. 14:11,

I have sworn by myself,  
the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness,  
and shall not return,  
That unto me every knee shall bow,  
every tongue shall swear.

Paul probably had this passage from Isaiah in mind when he wrote to the Philippians,

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
of things in heaven, and things in earth,  
and things under the earth (Phil. 2:10).

When Stephen was being stoned, and just before he died, we are told in Acts 7:60,

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice,  
Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.  
And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

In Acts 9:40 we read that, when Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, he

. . . put them all forth,  
and kneeled down, and prayed . . .

When Peter left the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:36, we read:

And when he had thus spoken,  
he kneeled down, and prayed with them.

In the next chapter, Acts 21, and verse 5, we have another scene when Paul departed from the believers at Tyre:

And when we had accomplished those days,  
we departed and went our ways;  
and they all brought us on our way,  
with wives and children,

till we were out of the city:  
and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

But the most instructive and touching scene of all is taken from the life of our Lord when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:41 says this:

And he was withdrawn from them (the disciples)  
about a stone's cast,  
and kneeled down, and prayed.

Why kneel? What is its significance?

It was an expression recognizing the greatness of God, the humbling of the one who was praying, often an expression of repentance when it needed to be, and finally it was evidence of submission to God. When Elijah was lamenting that he was the only prophet left, the Lord said to him,

Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel,  
all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal,  
and every mouth which hath not kissed him  
(1 Kings 19:18).

So I would suggest that, whenever it is possible, especially in our own personal time with the Lord, we kneel as we pray. Even such a posture will be good for us. It is said that Daniel, when he knew that the decree had been signed that no one was to ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, that

. . . he went into his house;  
and his windows being open in his chamber  
toward Jerusalem,  
he kneeled upon his knees three times a day,  
and prayed, and gave thanks to his God,  
as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10).

You are following in a great tradition if you kneel, like Paul did, when you pray.

But notice another thing:

### III. THE ONE TO WHOM PAUL PRAYED (Eph. 3:14b, 15).

It was "unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

Prayer, as a general rule laid down in Scripture, is to be addressed to God, the Father. But we must remember that He is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We come to Him as members of His family, and we are "named" "of" Him--meaning that we bear His Name. He has given us His Name because we are members of His family.

And there is only one family! So Paul was praying for his brothers and sisters in the family of God, the people upon whom God has placed His Name. He has given His Name to them.

Our son, Gary, who the pastor of Hillcrest Chapel in west Portland, is having quite a time now investigating the Custis name and family. Our oldest son, Dwight, and his wife, Nancy, are here from their home in California, and on Thursday and Friday of this week we were in the Tacoma area to see two of my brothers, and several of our nephews and nieces, some of whom I had not seen for over 30 years. One of the other things we did was to go to the cemetery where my folks are buried, and stood at their graves. Many, many thoughts flooded my mind as I stood there. Although there have been times when I have not been very thankful to be a Custis, yet my heart was filled with thanksgiving to God as I stood there by the grave of my folks, those two dear people who loved me, prayed for me, disciplined me, encouraged me, and sometimes were grieved by me. But it is an honor to carry the name Custis, and you would understand why I say that if you had known my folks. When I was born, they named me by their name. I was L. Dwight Custis. I know that many of you could say the same thing about your name because of your parents.

But I'll tell you something more wonderful than that! Those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour have another Name upon us. There are flaws on the Custis name, but there are no flaws on the Name which we bear as the children of God. God's has His family in two places: in heaven, and on earth. Some day we are all going to be together, and then we will know how wonderful it is to have God's holy Name upon us. But notice: These were the family that Paul was praying for. What were his requests? We just have time for one.

#### IV. THE FIRST REQUEST (Eph. 3:16).

His first request was that they might be "strengthened."

He wasn't concerned here about their physical strength. Nor was he concerned here about their fiscal strength. He was concerned about their spiritual strength! He was not concerned about the outer man that was perishing, but he was concerned about "the inner man," the soul.

Why this?

- A. Because he knew that spiritually they needed to be stronger than they were. They would always need to

grow. We are all weak in ourselves. We yield so quickly and willingly to temptation. We fall by the wayside so easily. We need to be strengthened because we are weak.

Strengthening also requires cleansing us from sin. A sinning Christian is always a weak Christian. This is evident from the fact that the Israelites were always vulnerable to their enemies when their lives were displeasing to the Lord. The Lord often uses trials to cleanse us. Prov. 20:30 in the NKJV says:  
Blows that hurt cleanse away evil,  
as do stripes the inner depths of the heart.

Much is said  
about strength  
in Scripture.

Cf. Ex. 15:26.  
PHIL. 4:13

PETER IN  
Lk. 22:32.

ACTS 1:8.

1 PET. 5:10

PSA. 46:1

PSA. 27:1b.

But what do we need to be strengthened for? What is the object?

- B. We need to be strengthened in order to know and understand the Word.
- C. We need to be strengthened in order to obey the Word. Paul will have a lot to say about our walk in the last three chapters of this Epistle.
- D. We need to be strengthened for the trials that will come our way.

Paul was writing to the Colossians at the same time that he was writing to the Ephesians. And to the Colossians he said that they would be . . .

Strengthened with all might,  
according to his glorious power,  
unto all patience and longsuffering  
with joyfulness (Col.1:11).

Finally, in the last chapter of this Epistle, we learn that . . .

- E. We need to be strengthened for our warfare with the Devil.

But how are we to be strengthened? There is only One Who can do that for us, and He is the blessed Holy Spirit, that Member of the Godhead Who is One with the Father and the Son.

How does He strengthen us? The rest of the prayer deals with that question. But let me say here, in addition to what we find in our text, that we are strengthened:

- 1) By the Word.
- 2) By prayer. Cf. Psa. 138:3.
- 3) By our fellowship with other Christians.

- 4) By our trials. Cf. 2 Cor. 12:9.
- 5) By others who pray for us. Cf. our text.
- 6) By the loving attention given to us by our heavenly Father.
- 7) By the intercessory prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ who ever lives to make intercession for us.

Concl: Have you recognized your need?

Many of you know of Matthew Henry, an English preacher who lived in the late 1600's and early 1700's. He died on June 22, 1714. This is the way he spoke of his generation, and they are words which could be spoken of our generation today. He said this of the professing Christians of his day:

There are but few who are truly religious; who believe the report of the gospel, and who are will to take the pains, and run the hazards of religion. Many make a fair show in the flesh, but few only walk closely with God. Where is he that engageth his heart, and that stirs himself up to take hold of his Maker? It is our common complaint that there are so many poor, but who complains that there are so many ignorant, which a man may be, and yet be able, like a parrot, to say his creed and catechism. Those who knew not the way of the Lord, yet said, "the Lord liveth." Many are painting their own cabin though the ship sink (The Life of Matthew Henry, p. 138).

Of the world, he said this:

People are lying under divine wrath, and the curse of the law; they are held in the devil's snare, and led captive by him at his will: they yet think their condition good. They are dead in sin, and so feel nothing. Their peace is like the sleep of a man in a lethargy: it is not peace--but senselessness and stupidity. They love darkness and sit in it. My heart bleeds for them. Men are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Ibid.).

So, look at the world, you see weakness which leads men farther and farther from God and deeper and deeper into sin. Look at the Church and you see weakness that falls short of real fellowship with God, and weakness that causes those who profess to belong to God to live, and dress, and speak, and covet just like the world.

What does the Church need more than anything else today? She needs strength. Where does that strength come from? The Holy Spirit. And in the process of being strengthened, the needs of the Church will be met, and then, and only then, can there be a mighty ministry of spiritual power in the world.

CHRIST AT HOME IN YOUR HEART  
Ephesians 3:17

Intro: Alexander Maclaren speaks of Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 3 as consisting of steps on a great staircase which climbs toward a great summit, which we are continually approaching, but can never fully reach--the summit expressed in the last part of verse 19: "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Who would ever think that we could pray such a prayer, or entertain such a hope, if we did not have it in the Word of God?

But each point in this prayer is equally amazing.

As I have pointed out to you before, we see in Paul's prayer that we, as believers in Christ, are involved with all three Members of the Godhead.

Last week we considered the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit--that He strengthens us inwardly, or as Paul prayed, "in the inner man." He strengthens us inwardly to bring about real and lasting changes in our hearts, and that, in turn, affects our outward behaviour. And He does this through the Word of God. He does it through prayer. He does it through our fellowship with each other. He does it through the prayers of our fellow-believers. He does it through the intercessory work of our Saviour. And He does it through the loving ways of God in His providential leading and blessing in our lives. But it is all under the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit.

Today we come to verse 17 which is actually a part of Paul's first request for the saints at Ephesus.

Let me discuss with you, for just a moment, Paul's use of the word "that" in this prayer, and I would like to suggest one change from what we have in the KJV.

You will notice that you have the word "that" in v. 16, twice in v. 17, and once in v. 19. I want to leave the one in v. 16, and the one in v. 19 where they are. But I would like to suggest a slight change in v. 17.

That first "That" in v. 17 is not a separate word in the Greek, but it is understood in the verb that Paul used, and is added by the translators to make it smoother English. Paul was saying that the object of the strengthening work of the Spirit was "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."

But the "that ye" which you have in the middle of verse 17 really belongs with v. 18. So, to make it closer to the

original text we would read it this way, reading from v. 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,  
 (That) Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;  
 being rooted and grounded in love,  
 That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints . . .

But, you say, what difference does this make?

Well, in suggesting these changes I want you to see that Paul was making three requests here, not four. And that the first request is in vv. 16 and 17. The second request is in v. 18, and the first part of v. 19. And the third request is in the latter part of v. 19.

In Paul's first request he was praying that they would be strengthened by the Spirit in order that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith.

In the second request he was praying that they would be able to comprehend in incomprehensible love of Christ.

In the third request he was praying that they would be filled with all of the fulness of God.

And, as Alexander Maclaren suggested, the three requests are like the steps on a staircase. The Lord does the first for us, and then the second, that we might experience the third. In other words, you cannot be filled with all of the fulness of God unless you come to an understanding of the fourfold measurements of the love of Christ. And you cannot understand Christ's love unless Christ is dwelling in you as a result of the way in which the Spirit of God is strengthening you in your heart.

But let me say this other thing which Alexander Maclaren mentioned in the quotation I gave you at the beginning. He said this about the last request, that it is "ever approached, never reached." But I want to say it about all three. You and I are never so strong in the Spirit but what we need to be stronger. We never know the love of Christ so well but what we need to know it better. And we are never so full of God but what we can experience an even greater fulness. And this is what I mean by all of that: This is a prayer that you can always pray for every child of God--for the most mature saint, and for the most immature. It is a prayer we can pray for each other as long as we live in this world. We never go so deep but what we can go deeper. We never go so far but what we can go farther. We never go so high but what we can go higher.

But now let us get to the last part of Paul's first request in v. 17.

Notice first of all that Paul moves from the work of the Holy Spirit to an emphasis upon CHRIST.

### I. THE INDWELLING CHRIST.

In Paul's first prayer in chapter 1 he said this about Christ: that God had  
     raised him from the dead,  
     and set him at his own right hand  
     in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20).

Now in this prayer he said that Christ was to dwell in our hearts. Which is true? Is Christ at the Father's right hand, or is He in our hearts?

Let me suggest another question: If Christ is dwelling in our hearts, whose heart does He indwell--yours or mine?

Most of you would probably give me the right answers. You would say that He is at the Father's right hand, but He is also indwelling us. And you would say that He is not just indwelling one of us, but all of us. And I hope that you would say that each one of us has all of Christ, not just a part of Christ for me, and another part of Christ for you. He is completely with the Father. And He is completely with you, and completely with me, and completely with every believer on the face of the earth.

To the person who is not a Christian this sounds like so much hocus-pocus. People would feel that you have to be a little out of your mind to teach something like this.

How can reasonable people believe a truth like this?

There is just one answer: We believe this about the Lord Jesus Christ because we believe that He is God! And even though He has a human, glorified body, we believe that He is omnipresent! Therefore, He can be with the Father, praying for us, and at the same time be with us, each one of us, in the whole of His Person.

→  
TWO ANSWERS:  
THE SECOND -  
WE BELIEVE  
THE BIBLE IS  
GOD'S WORD.

So let us stop and give this our serious consideration. Paul was praying that we would know the indwelling presence of God, the Son, in our hearts! That is an amazing request, truly amazing!

In Col. 1:27 Paul wrote, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." He told the Galatian churches that "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). He said to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 13:5b):



Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you,  
except ye be reprobates?

A reprobate is one who does not pass the test of being a Christian. He is one who claims to be a Christian, but he really isn't a Christian. So Paul was saying that, if you are a Christian, Jesus Christ is living in you.

Now spend a few moments now, and a lot of time later, thinking about this great truth.

But let me go on to another point. Let me call it:

## II. THE INDWELLING.

My question is this: IF CHRIST LIVES IN US, WHY DID PAUL PRAY THIS PRAYER? WAS HE NOT PRAYING FOR SOMETHING THAT WAS ALREADY TRUE OF THOSE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS?

Thus it becomes important for us to know just what Paul meant.

The INDWELLING suggests at least two things:

- A. Paul was praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was living in them would be at home in their hearts. He would feel daily that He belonged there, that He was not just a visitor.

How do we do that?

By speaking with Him, recognizing Him, seeking to honor Him. We do it by not allowing anything to remain in our hearts or in our lives that would be displeasing to Him. Think of what you would do, and how you would act, if the Lord Jesus Christ were to make a physical appearance in your home. There is no reason to imagine that this is true; it is true! And we need to make Him feel welcome.

But there is this other idea.

- B. Paul was praying that their fellowship with the Lord would be a continuing relationship—not one of ups and downs, but a constant, growing, joyous relationship with the Lord.

Too often we are zealous in seeking the Lord, and then we suddenly cool off. The Lord knows when this happens, and we do, too. Do you remember what the Lord said to the Ephesians at a later date through the writings of the Apostle John? He said this:

I have somewhat against thee

because thou hast left thy first love  
(Rev. 2:4).

How would you describe your relationship with the Lord?  
Is your love for Him as great as it used to be? Do you  
spend your life trying to please yourself, or HIM? Do  
you allow things in your life that you know He is not  
pleased with? Is your heart Christ's home?

This brings me to my last point. Let me call it,

### III. MAKING A HOME FOR CHRIST.

Remember that we are speaking about our hearts, the very  
center of our being, that part of us which really is what  
we are before God.

Paul indicates that it has to do with two spiritual  
realities: one is FAITH; the other is LOVE.

#### A. Faith.

Paul's prayer was, "That Christ may dwell in your  
hearts by faith."

Faith means at least two things as far as this prayer  
is concerned:

##### 1. We believe that the Lord is there.

We believe it, not because we were aware of it  
when He came, nor because we have any special  
feeling of it. We believe it because His Word  
says that He is there. "We walk by faith, not by  
sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "But without faith it is  
impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). Believing  
does not make it true, but believing accepts the  
fact that it is true. You will not get anywhere  
in the Christian life until you start walking by  
faith, acting upon the truth of the Word of God.

##### 2. We trust Him.

Faith means trust. The Lord must have a very  
good reason for coming to live in our hearts--and  
He does! We need Him. We need Him desperately.  
We cannot live without Him. We need His fellow-  
ship. We need His power. We need His wisdom.  
We need His grace. There are countless numbers  
of ways we need the Lord every moment of our  
lives.

So if He is dwelling in our hearts by faith, it means that we believe that He is there, and we live accordingly, trusting Him, depending upon Him, pleasing Him, glorifying Him.

But the other word we need to spend a moment or two on is the word:

B. Love.

Love is an important word in this prayer. We will see more about it next week when, the Lord willing, we will consider,

That ye may be able to comprehend  
with all saints  
what is the breadth, and length,  
and depth, and height;  
And to know the love of Christ,  
which passeth knowledge.

But for now we want to look at those words, "being rooted and grounded in love." What did Paul have in mind?

Well, I am not going to say that I know all that he had in mind, but let me tell you at least in part what I think that he had in mind.

The word "grounded" is from the same root as the word "foundation" in Eph. 2:20. There the Apostle Paul was speaking of the truth of the Church, and that we as believers "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). He was speaking of us, not just as individual believers, but as the Body of Christ, as the Church.

So it seems that he was returning to that idea in his prayer in chapter 3. In strengthening us as individual believers, the Church is strengthened. In making a home for Christ in our hearts, Christ has a home in the Church. And Paul wanted us to know that the roots of our relationship to God, the foundation upon which our relationship to Him is based, is LOVE--love in three directions:

- 1) God's love, Christ's love for us.
- 2) Our love for God and for Christ.
- 3) Our love for each other as those in whom Christ has made His home.

Paul used two perfect participles here which simply means that we were rooted in the past, and we continue to be rooted now. We were placed on that foundation in the past, and we still are on it. The

foundation of LOVE. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Or, as the text actually read, We love, because He first loved us. We love God, we love Christ, we love the Holy Spirit, because they first loved us. And so we love each other. If they had not loved us, we would not have loved them, nor would have loved each other. Take the love of God and of Christ out of the Church, and the Church ceases to be the Church.

Concl: The time came when the Lord Jesus Christ did not feel at home in the Ephesian church. Remember what I read to you from Rev. 2:4.

What about your heart? What about my heart? What about Trinity Bible Church—does the Lord have a home with us? Do we believe that He is with us? Are we trusting Him? Is our greatest desire to please Him? When people come to meet with us, do they learn of Him?

If I understand this prayer aright, Paul was concerned about the individual believers in Ephesus, and then of the Church. He wanted Christ to be at home in their individual lives. Then it would follow that He would be at home in the church at Ephesus. How important it is for all of us to be strengthened by the Spirit that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, because we have been, and still are, rooted and grounded in the love of God and the love of Christ.

May this be our prayer for each other, and for our church. And may God grant that His blessing will abound in our fellowship to such a degree that the people who visit with us may realize beyond any doubt that Christ is with us, and that His home is here in our hearts.

THE MEASURELESS LOVE OF CHRIST  
Ephesians 3:18, 19a

Intro: So far, in considering Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, we have examined one request, the request which prepares the way for this second request. Remember that the words, "that ye," which are found in the middle of verse 17 in the KJV, probably belong at the beginning of verse 18. So in verses 16 and 17 we have the first request, in verses 18 and the beginning of verse 19 we have the second request, and the last part of verse 19 gives us the climactic, culminating, the crowning, third request: "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Therefore, we come in this second request to:

- I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST'S LOVE: "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints . . . and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18a, 19a).

We will come in a few minutes to those four dimensions of the love of Christ, but for now let us take this two clauses and concentrate of knowing the love of Christ.

I am not going to bother you with all of the suggestions that have been made about what we are to know from Paul's words at the end of verse 18. It seems clear to me that Paul was speaking of Christ's love, and that is the subject we are involved with here in verse 18. To make it mean anything else would be to introduce something into Paul's prayer that is not to be seen in his words.

Now it is "the love of Christ" that Paul was concerned about, not the love of God. It is the same love, of course, but Paul was thinking especially of this divine love as it is to be seen in Christ, and as it is manifested by Christ. It is very clear in Scripture that we, as the people of God, are loved by God. But it is equally clear that we are loved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul spoke in Gal. 2:20 of Christ who loved him, and gave Himself for him. He told the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 5:14 that he was constrained by the love of Christ. And to the Romans Paul raised the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35a).

We have been thinking about Christ thus far in Paul's prayer. Paul was praying that Christ would "dwell in your hearts by faith," that He would find a home in the hearts of the Ephesian believers, and that from that they would "be able to comprehend with all saints . . ."

It is very interesting to see that from such an intimate fellowship with Christ was the first petition suggested,

the one thing that would impress the child of God the most about Christ is His love.

But how can we know Christ's love if it passeth knowledge? How can we be "able to comprehend with all saints" something which "passeth knowledge"?

- > I think the answer is quickly discerned by anyone who understands the nature of divine truth in relation to man's ability to understand that truth. We cannot "comprehend" the truth of Christ's love if we have only our own mental powers to work with! The love of Christ is beyond human comprehension. That is the reason Paul prayed that they would "be able to comprehend." Knowing the truth of God is more than a matter of just reading the Bible, or attending church, or some Bible Class. Those are all important, very important, in fact. But unless we are given the ability to understand, we will remain in our ignorance. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit becomes absolutely essential. We cannot understand the love of Christ, or any other part of the Word of God, unless the Holy Spirit teaches us, guiding us into the truth of the Word of God. That is a part of what He does in answer to Paul's first request in this prayer.

Now it is possible to learn a great deal about the love of Christ from the Word. We can see Christ's love in the works that He did while He was here on earth. We can certainly see His love in His death. But it is possible to gain a lot of factual information about the love of Christ without ever having our hearts moved by this great depth. Paul was not just talking about something intellectual; he was praying about a knowledge that would move the Ephesians to the very depths of their beings, a knowledge that would change their lives, a knowledge that would cause the love of Christ to be manifested through them.

We can all know a lot of truth in a mechanical, intellectual way, but only the Holy Spirit can enable us to understand the spiritual significance of the Word of God.

- > But notice another thing about this knowledge: It results from personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Where is He? He is living in us. He has found a home in our hearts. We are walking with Him, and enjoying fellowship with Him, and learning of Him. Christ has become to us a very real Person. And we personally learn from our fellowship with Him about His love.

- > But there is still more for us to see here.

Note that Paul addressed them here as "saints." What is a saint? Who is a saint? This was a very prominent term used for the people of God in the early days of the Church. They were not called Christians on any large scale; they were saints!

Now it is one thing to be called a saint, but it is another thing to live up to such a name. A saint is a holy person. He or she is a person who fears the Lord, who wants to please the Lord, who separates himself or herself from all sin, from any and everything that is pleasing to God. So our ability to comprehend the love of Christ is definitely related by Paul to the extent to which we are living holy lives. The more holy a child of God is, the greater will be his understanding and enjoyment of the love of Christ. We are not perfectly holy, but we are to be moving in that direction.

- > There is one more thing before we move on to those four dimensions.

It has to do with those words, "with all saints."

I think I mentioned last week that Paul was not only concerned in this Epistle with the individual believer all by himself, but he was concerned about the individual believer in his relationship with all other believers. He mentioned in verse 15 of this prayer that we are all members of God's family. Previously he had mentioned that we are all members of Christ's body, the Church. And so we cannot ignore the family relationship that we have with each other. Neither can we ignore the fact that we are fellow-members of the body of Christ. We are not going to heaven by ourselves; we are traveling in the company of the saints. We are intimately joined to Christ, but we are intimately and eternally joined to each other. Therefore, our understanding of the love of Christ will bring the greatest blessing to ourselves and the greatest glory to God when we show it in our love for each other. Christians who do not love each other are a contradiction of the very profession that they make to be the children of God.

So you can see that there is a lot in this second request. We are to know what is really beyond the ability of man to know. It is a knowledge that must grow and grow, a knowledge which we can never fully attain. It is a knowledge that is best understood by saints, not isolating themselves from other saints, but understanding it and experiencing it and enjoying it together.

But let us go on to the latter part of verse 18 and . . .

#### IV. THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST (Eph. 3:18b).

Long before man was thinking in terms of three dimensions, God was speaking in terms of four dimensions. Here it is: "breadth, and length, and depth, and height." We could express it this way:

- 1) How wide is it?
- 2) How long is it?
- 3) How deep is it?
- 4) How high is it?

I will not bother you with the fact that these dimensions are listed in a different order in some of the versions. They are all there, and our business is to understand what they mean.

##### A. How wide is the love of Christ?

Or to state it another way, how inclusive is the love of Christ?

Paul used the verb from which this noun comes in 2 Cor. 6:11 when he told the Corinthians, "Our heart is enlarged" (toward you, understood). What did he mean? He meant that he loved them all. How enlarged is God's heart, how wide is His heart, how broad is it?

Can you still sing that children's song?

Jesus loves the little children,  
All the children of the world,  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
They are precious in His sight,  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

We ought to be able to sing it. The Lord has a special love for His people, but there is a sense in which we need to realize His love for all. He wept over Jerusalem, and said that He often would have gathered her throughout her history, but she would not.

When we get to heaven, who is going to be there? People from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Cf. Rev. 5:9. The love of God and of Christ is wide enough to include all who will come for a drink from the wells of salvation.

What about classes of people? Does it include the rich as well as the poor? Yes. Does it include the moral as well as the immoral? Yes. Does it include



the slave as well as the free? Yes. Draw any contrast you want, and you will find that the love of Christ can be proclaimed to all.

B. How long is the love of Christ?

Will it ever end? Will it ever change? Is it possible that the love of Christ would ever be exhausted? Could we ever do anything that would cause the Lord to stop loving us? Could any situation ever arise that would change Christ's love for us.

Let us let Paul answer this question:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
 shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,  
 or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?  
 Nay, in all these things  
 we are more than conquerors  
 through him that loved us.  
 For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life,  
 nor angels, nor principalities nor powers,  
 nor things present, nor things to come,  
 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,  
 shall be able to separate us  
 from the love of God,  
 which is in Christ Jesus our Lord  
 (Rom. 8:35, 37-39).

Christ never changes, and so His love never changes.

C. How deep is Christ's love?

Ask the penitent  
 chief.

Ask Rahab, the harlot. Ask David who committed adultery and murder. Ask Zacchaeus, the publican. Ask Peter who denied his Lord. Ask Saul of Tarsus, the blasphemer. David was probably speaking about some experience he had as a child of God, but he expressed it in these words:

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit,  
 out of the miry clay,  
 and set my feet upon a rock,  
 and established my goings.  
 And he hath put a new song in my mouth,  
 even praise unto our God:  
 many shall see it, and fear,  
 and shall trust in the Lord (Psa. 40:2, 3).

The love of God goes just as deep as it needs to go in order to save any sinner who repents. The love of God goes just as deep as it needs to go to reach the believer who has fallen into sin.

The love of Christ has snatched us all from the jaws of eternal death, and from the gates of hell itself.

D. How high is the love of Christ?

Paul told us in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2. God through Christ and with Christ has quickened us together with Christ . . . And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5b, 6).

More than that, the day is coming when we will "be to the praise of his glory," transformed into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. How could He have raised us to any greater heights than to ordain that we shall be like He is. There is no greater height than that!

Concl: Do you understand what I have been saying about the love of Christ? If you do, you are learning that which is unknowable apart from the grace of God? Do you understand what I have been saying about the four dimensions of Christ's love? Then you are beginning to measure the measureless love of God. There is more to know. There is more to enjoy. There are many more ways in which these great truths need to change our lives. But let us thank God if we have even gotten our feet over the threshold. There is no greater subject than the love of Christ. Oh, that we would be so filled with His love, and so delighted with His love, that people would begin to ask us about the hope that we have because of Christ's great love.

Samuel Trevor Francis (1834-1925) has expressed this truth far better than I can in that wonderful hymn which we all love to sing. Listen to the words as I read them for you.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
 vast, unmeasured, boundless, free;  
 Rolling as a mighty ocean  
 In its fulness over me.  
 Underneath me, all around me,  
 Is the current of thy love;  
 leading onward, leading homeward,  
 To thy glorious rest above.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
 Spread his praise from shore to shore;  
 How he loveth, ever loveth,  
 Changeth never, nevermore;  
 How he watches o'er his loved ones,  
 Died to call them all his own;

How for them he intercedeth,  
Watcheth o'er them from the throne.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Love of ev'ry love the best:  
'Tis an ocean vast of blessing,  
'Tis a haven sweet of rest.  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;  
And it lifts me up to glory,  
For it lifts me up to thee.

May the Lord enable us to know Christ's love better, to  
experience its blessing more fully, and to manifest<sup>it</sup> to those  
about us in ways that we never have before.

THE FULNESS OF GOD  
Ephesians 3:19b-21

Intro: We come today to the end of this great prayer Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus. One writer (A. T. Robertson, Vol. IV, p. 533) has called this final request,

I. "THIS SUBLIME CLIMAX" (Eph. 1:19b).

This is the highest point in Paul's prayer, the request toward which all of the other requests have been moving. In fact, there can be no higher point that any human being can attain--"that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." This is the highest point of all truth in its relation to the people of God. There is nothing higher than to "be filled with all the fulness of God."

Perhaps we can get a clearer understanding of this expression if we remember how Paul used it in his letter to the Colossians. He used the word twice in that Epistle, and in both instances it referred to Christ. See Col. 1:19. There, speaking of Christ, Paul said this:

For it pleased the Father  
that in him should all fulness dwell.

In Col.2:9 we have these words, again referring to Christ, we have these words:

For in him dwelleth  
all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

From these verses we can see that to "be filled with all of the fulness of God" definitely has something to do with Christ and us.

But Paul had used the word "fulness" in Eph. 1:23 in a way that is related to the final request in his prayer. There he referred to the Church as "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

If we were to take Paul's request in its absolute sense, we would have to say that he was praying that the people of God would become Deity. When it is used of Christ, it certainly becomes one of those texts which speaks of the Deity of our Lord. But it is not used that way of us.

Practically every commentator I have read who has dealt with the meaning of the word, "fulness," says that the picture is of two vessels, or containers--two bowls, a large bowl and a small bowl. The large bowl is full; the small bowl, to begin with, is empty. The small bowl is to be filled from the larger bowl, but with this unique phenomenon taking place: the larger bowl remains just as

full as it was at the beginning. And yet it is gradually filling the smaller bowl. You could never get all that is in the larger bowl into the smaller bowl, but you can fill the smaller bowl until it is full!

We have a good illustration of this in the OT.

It is found in 2 Kings 4:1-7 where we have the story of the wife of a prophet who had died. The wife had a debt which she could not pay, and the creditor was coming to take her sons to make them slaves. One thing she said that has a great deal of significance was this--and she was speaking to Elisha:

Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house,  
save a pot of oil.

Elisha told her to go borrow all of the "empty vessels" that she could get from her neighbors, and to fill them from the pot of oil that she had. Her sons went and got all that they could get, their mother filled them. And when they were all full, the Scriptures say that "the oil stayed" (2 Kings 4:6b). She was able to sell the oil, pay her debt, and keep her sons.

We are like those empty vessels. God is pictured by the "pot of oil" which the widow had. We are filled full out of the fulness of God, and yet we never exhaust the fulness of God. He remains the same; we are the ones who are changed. He is the perfect One; we are being perfected out of His fulness.

Perhaps this was Paul's way of saying what our Lord said in Matt. 5:48,

Be ye therefore perfect,  
even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

There is a perfection of holiness in God, an inexhaustible supply. We are to be holy, as God is holy--not Deity, but holy. The way we are made holy is out of the holiness of God, a holiness which also was in our Lord Jesus Christ to a perfect degree.

So we need to have Christ at home in our hearts, we need to be learning more and more about His love, and, in doing so, we are being "filled with all of the fulness of God." We are become God-like, and Christ-like. This is the end, the purpose, of our salvation.

Bishop Moule, of the Church of England in the last century, quoted the words of Frances Ridley Havergal, the hymn writer, to express something of the profoundness of this request. Listen to her words:

Lord, we ask it, hardly knowing  
What this wondrous gift may be;  
Yet fulfil to overflowing;  
Thy great meaning let us see.

Make us, in Thy royal palace,  
Vessels worthy of the King;  
From Thy fulness fill our chalice,  
From Thy never-failing spring.

Father, by this blessed filling,  
Dwell Thyself in us, we pray;  
We are waiting, Thou art willing;  
Fill us with Thyself to-day.

Two things we know about "this sublime climax" to Paul's prayer:

- 1) It has to mean a closer, more intimate, fellowship with our Lord.
- 2) It will result in our becoming more like God and like Christ in our hearts and in our lives--inwardly and outwardly.

However, how can we ever hope to attain such a goal? Even to understand the truth about God seems to be more than we can achieve; how can we ever hope to be like God, and like our Lord Jesus Christ? We can surely feel what David felt when he was contemplating the omniscience of God:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is high, I cannot attain unto it (Psa. 139:6).

This is where the last two verses of Ephesians 3 become so extremely important. (Read them.)

Most of us have known these two verses. We can quote them. We believe them. And who has not applied them to some difficult situation that we have faced? This is speaking not only of a miracle, but a miracle that we have never asked God for, nor have we even thought about it.

The verses certainly apply to our problems and trials, but that is not the primary meaning of the verses. When we leave them right here, and consider them in the light of what Paul has been saying, then we see how really wonderful they are.

Let us call them:

## II. A DOXOLOGY TO OUR ALMIGHTY GOD (Eph. 3:20, 21).

In the light of such amazing requests, we very obviously need HELP--and lots of it!

What is one thing, the most fantastic, the most far-fetched thing, that you can think of--something that you would never think of asking God to do for you? If you could be assured that God would do anything for you that your heart would desire, what would it be? To suddenly become a millionaire? To be able to play the piano like a concert pianist without having to practice a single day? To be so healthy that you would never be sick again, and never die? Remember Paul was speaking about something that you have not only never prayed for, but you have not even thought of it? What would it be?

Let me tell you what it is. The most absurd, ridiculous, far-fetched, unreasonable, nonsensical request that you could ever make, one that you and I would never think of asking God for is this: **THAT HE WOULD MAKE US LIKE HE IS!** You would never think of that apart from God's grace. In fact, if it were not for the grace of God, you would not even want such a thing if you happened to hear about it!

**BUT HERE IS THE TRUTH: THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO, INTENDS TO DO, AND ULTIMATELY WILL DO, FOR ALL OF US WHO HAVE COME TO KNOW HIM THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

We are not able to do it, but He is! We do not have such power, but He does! We would soon give up if we tried, but He never will!

But let me add this.

We all have some idea of what we think this would mean, and what it would take, to make us God-like in our character, and God-like in our behavior. But even our understanding is so limited, so finite, so far below what it would really take and what the result even in this life. So Paul said that God would not only do for us what we would never have thought of, nor dared to ask if we had thought of it, but He will do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"! What do you think of that? When God works, He works far above and beyond anything that we have ever thought possible!

This is a work that God started when you and I were first saved. There may have been times, possibly many times when we have forgotten about, and have not prayed about it, but God never has forgotten. His ultimate purpose in our salvation, as Dr. Chafer used to tell us in his classes at Dallas Seminary, is to fill heaven with people who are just like His Son! If you belong to the Lord, you are one of them. And I can certainly say, with real gratitude to God, that I am one of them. **BUT WE CANNOT**

DO IT BY OURSELVES. GOD IS ABLE! This is one of the most glorious of all of the certainties of the Word of God.

Now, in view of all of this great truth, what remains to be said? Paul said it in verse 21. (Read.)

Who is "the church"? We are. We are not the whole Church, but we are definitely a very real part of it.

What are we supposed to be doing? We are to join the saints of all of the past ages of time, and the saints of all future ages of time and eternity, in doing one thing: IN GIVING GLORY TO GOD "BY CHRIST JESUS"--NOW, AND FOREVER AND FOREVER AND FOREVER FOR ALL ETERNITY. I don't get the glory, and you don't get the glory, BUT HE DOES! HE IS THE ONE WHO DOES THAT WORK IN OUR HEARTS, AND SO HE GETS THE GLORY. And when I say, "He," I mean God, the Father, and God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. We have responsibilities in this, but God is the Miracle-Worker.

Concl: When I get to the end of Ephesians 3, I feel like I usually do when I get to the end of Romans 8. All you have to do is to look around and you will see that you are in glory. This is the highest ground it is possible for any of us to walk on here on earth. This makes Mt. Everest look like a mole hill.

Can you sing from the heart that wonderful old Gospel song?

I'm pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I'm gaining every day;  
Still praying as I'm onward bound,  
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

My heart has no desire to stay  
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;  
Though some may dwell where these abound,  
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

I want to live above the world,  
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound,  
The song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height,  
And catch a gleam of glory bright;  
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,  
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground."

Lord, lift me up, and let me stand,



By faith, on heaven's tableland,  
A higher plane than I have found;  
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

We talk about wanting the Lord to come so that we can be with Him. But are we just as anxious to be like the Lord? That is what is going to make heaven, heaven. And, as the Puritans used to point out so well, that is what can bring us heaven here on earth.

Has your pilgrim journey through this world temporarily gotten on a sidetrack? How do you get going again?

Let me suggest two things in closing?

- 1) Pray. And pray like Paul prayed in this prayer. Ask the Lord to make it your prayer, the cry of your heart.
- 2) Secondly, begin to look for the answer in your own heart. Make Christ a home in your heart. Cultivate a closer fellowship with Him. Look for Him in the Word. Seek to learn more about Him, and to love Him more, and to trust Him more.

If you pray this prayer from your heart, and begin to trust God for the answer, using the means He has given us, mainly prayer and the Word, you will soon begin to see that you will start climbing heavenward again. The Lord will not leave you on that sidetrack if you really belong to Him. Perhaps He brought you here today to get you start walking with Him again.

May all of us seek Him more earnestly, and endeavor by His grace, to let His Word be the one and only Lamp to our feet, and Light upon our pathway. Let us pray.