



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, November 10, 2024

Ephesians 3:14-21

Last week as we walked through the beginning section of chapter 3, we saw Paul start talking about the mysteries of God and how they relate to us. Often times, perhaps as a result of the society or culture that we find ourselves in, we have been conditioned to believe that full understanding is a prerequisite for our acceptance of a truth. However, when it comes to the Gospel, full understanding is literally impossible, for how can our finite minds truly understand an infinite God. This is where trust comes into play. Even though we don't fully comprehend the ways of God, that doesn't stop us from accepting the things that He has in store for us because we have a relationship with Him that is based on trust. We call this trust-relationship with Christ, Faith. The Bible teaches that it is impossible to please God without faith, reminding us that we aren't meant to have full comprehension of everything. Faith, then, must be embraced, as it moves us towards placing our hope and trust in Christ's love - knowing that His plans are to bless us, not to harm us. And for many of us, this is a completely freeing way of approaching Christianity. That we actually don't have to have it all figured out in order to embrace the love and truth and path of Jesus Christ. Now, as we finish off, Chapter 3 today, there is still one section from last week that I'd like to cover off before going any further.

In verse 8-13, Paul reminds the Ephesians that he is the least of all saints yet Christ pulled him out of his darkness and transformed him from persecutor to preacher, reminding us that no matter where we've been or what we've done, when we give God control, He can do great and mighty things through us. And it's here, in verse 10, that we see just how far-reaching this transformation can be - not only impacting us as individuals (like in Paul's story), but collectively as the church. Paul says that through this transformation, the 'manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places...'

This passage is significant because Paul is now shifting the emphasis from the individual to the church. God's plan for redemption and transformation is on display through us as individuals, yes, but also through His church - a community of believers who serve as a living, visible example to the world of the unity, love, and continual transformation that He offers. And it's only when the church

is being the church, that this example to the world is at its strongest.

But Paul doesn't stop there does he? He goes on to say that how the church behaves, impacts not only those around us, but also the spiritual realm: 'the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.' So, it seems that God is using the church to demonstrate His glory to all living beings, both physical and spiritual. Both loyal angels and even the fallen ones. So, the very existence of the church as a unified body of believers actually declares the ultimate power and authority and glory of God in an incredible way.

A great example to help wrap our minds around this is ice cream. You see, just as ice cream has many different flavours, Christianity has many different denominations and expressions - 31 flavours of Christianity if you will. We have the Baptists and we have the Pentecostals. We have the Orthodox and we have the Anglicans. We have Presbyterians and the Reformed, and the Brethren in Christ and so on and so forth. And in many ways, these flavours of Christianity give people options when seeking out a church expression that resonates with their personality, culture, and worship style - it's a beautiful thing. But the focus of the church should always be Jesus, not the flavour. Baskin Robbins doesn't sell cherry vanilla, and chocolate and tiger tail. No, they sell ice cream. The ice cream is the point - how it tastes while being consumed is always secondary! And so, in the same way, the church doesn't exist to highlight our differences in style or tradition, but to proclaim Jesus Christ. He is the foundation that unites us all, regardless of the 'flavour' of Christianity we may prefer. Each expression offers a unique way to experience and worship God, but the essence must remain the same: the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. And when we focus on Jesus as the core, our different ways of expressing our faith can actually enhance the church's witness, instead of inhibit it - by drawing a wide diversity of people to the power of God's love and grace through a beautifully diverse yet unified body of believers. This is why I call myself a Christian before any denomination. I am a follower of Jesus Christ first and foremost. I may choose to express my faith through the Pentecostal tradition, but my identity is rooted in Christ as one who calls themselves a Christian.

Paul's point being that unity within the church, despite our differences and denominations, is a true testament to God's redemptive plan and His authority. When the church truly embraces this pathway of unity, it becomes a powerful witness - reminding us that despite our different 'flavours,' we are one body, working together to reflect God's glory for all to see. Not only to those around us but to the entire spiritual realm.

Our lives, both individually and collectively, should point to the greatness of God's purpose, showing

a watching world - and a watching spiritual realm - that His wisdom and grace are real. It is our calling and responsibility to be the church that showcases God's manifold wisdom as Paul so eloquently puts it.

So now as we head into the reading for today, this call to unity in the church helps to frame this next section for us, as Paul now says:

Ephesians 3:14-21

'For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

This passage now serves as Paul's instruction to the church on how we are to operate, grounded in God's love and empowered by His Spirit. And the first thing I want you to notice here is the posture that Paul now assumes. Notice that in this prayer of Paul's, he now bows his knees to the Lord. This might seem commonplace to you and me as for many of us growing up in the church, we learned to pray before going to bed by first kneeling beside our bed and then closing our eyes and folding our hands. So we understand for the most part this concept of bowing our knees in prayer. But, it's important to understand the culture in which Paul is now presenting this. Kneeling was the norm for Gentiles, but not for Jews of which Paul was one. As a Jew, Paul would have stood to pray, lifting his hands to God. Not this time though. Paul gets down on his knees - in part because as a Jew himself, this would help him to identify with Gentiles (striving for unity within the church). But also because it's an intentional act of surrender, that shows us the depth of Paul's desire for the church to fully experience God's power and love as verse 16-17 suggest is already at work within us.

Now, these two verses can be a little complex and difficult to understand because they seem to be saying essentially the same thing. Let me read it to you again:

Ephesians 3:16-17a

'...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through

His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

So, Paul is indicating here that the Holy Spirit is within us, referring to this reality as the ‘inner man.’ He then goes on to say that Jesus Christ dwells in our hearts. Which can be confusing. How can the Holy Spirit dwell within us but Christ in our hearts?

Remember - this whole chapter is Paul inviting the Ephesians to embrace the complexities of the mysteries of God - demonstrating that there are certain things that once in place help establish and maintain unity within the church. And this concept, although it appears complex at first, becomes clearer when we understand the Trinity: God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are many verses that describe God’s presence within us. Some clearly indicate that we are the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit,’ empowered by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. And yet, at the same time, Jesus Himself says in the book of John that we are to abide in Him as He abides in us.

Essentially, being a temple of the Holy Spirit and having Christ dwell in our hearts are two ways of describing the same reality: that God’s indwelling presence through His Spirit, brings the life and power of Jesus into the very center of who we are. And even though Scripture teaches us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, He shares in God’s omnipresence as part of the Trinity, and so His presence with us is made real through the Holy Spirit. This profound mystery of the Trinity means that, through the Spirit’s indwelling, we can experience Christ’s love and influence in our hearts. So, when Paul speaks of Christ dwelling in our hearts, he’s describing this spiritual closeness - God at work in us, revealing the fullness of His presence and transforming us to reflect Christ.

And, while ‘hearts’ and ‘inner person’ seem similar, in ancient thought, the heart goes deeper. Historically, the ancient world saw the heart as the control center of each individual. So by talking about Christ dwelling in our hearts, Paul is drawing on this ancient understanding to remind the church in Ephesus and all across the world that no matter the denomination, Christ must be at the very center - the very core of who they are - their desires, decisions, and plans. And it’s the Holy Spirit within them that empowers them to relinquish this control over to Jesus. Paul isn’t just praying for Christ to reside in their hearts; he’s praying for a deeper, active influence of Christ in their lives by gaining full access to their heart - their wills, desires and plans. His prayer, therefore, is a call to spiritual maturity; to live a life where Christ’s love shapes everything they do.

This is why, as Christians, when referencing the call to salvation, we often use the phrase ‘Jesus, come into my heart.’ It’s because it signifies inviting Christ into our control center. This should re-

mind us of what we talked about last week when Paul said he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ - it's the same concept. He had relinquished all control to Christ, willingly accepting His Lordship to take the wheel!

And for some of us here to day the call is the same. It's a call to spiritual maturity - a call to let Christ dwell fully in our hearts, shaping every area of our lives. And as the church of Jesus Christ all across this world embraces this truth, then the example that we live will be plain for all to see!

3 points to consider as we close:

1. Throughout this section, Paul emphasizes various mysteries of God that we simply cannot fully comprehend. Yet in verses 18-19, he prays for our understanding of the love of Christ - that we would grasp its height, depth, length, and width. This understanding, Paul knows, is foundational; though we may not understand all mysteries, we can know and experience the love of Christ. And this comprehension continues to grow and deepen as our relationship with Him is stretched and strengthened. In our own lives, this means making relationship with the Lord a priority. Whether it be through prayer, Scripture, and worship, acts of service...etc, we can open our hearts to experience and understand His love more fully. As we make space for His love, it transforms us, giving us strength, comfort, and purpose that we can share with others.
2. It's a call to unity in the church - to keep the main thing the main thing. That oftentimes we can get caught up in peripheral things that can distract and detract us from what God is wanting to say and do in our lives. Stay rooted in His word and don't just read it with your head; ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what He wants you to see and do. And when He does, pray for the obedience to follow. Remain submitted to His Word, His will, and His way, keeping Christ at the center of everything we do as His church.
3. Paul's prayer for Christ to dwell in our hearts calls us to spiritual maturity - a maturity that allows Christ's love, through the Spirit, to influence every part of our lives. This means surrendering our wills, desires, and plans to Him, allowing His Spirit to lead us daily. As we embrace this call, we reflect Christ's love and grow in our understanding of His purpose for us individually and as His church.

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.'

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