

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

A Study of Ephesians

Study #25

I Bow My Knees

(Ephesians 3:14-19)

14 Τούτου χάριν κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα

15 ἐξ ὧν πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται

16 ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,

17 κατοικῆσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι

18 ἵνα ἐξισχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος,

19 γινῶναι τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ.

I. REVIEW

- A. In Ephesians 3:1, Paul began to express a thought. This thought was based on the truths he expounded in the passage immediately prior (2:19-22); specifically, that the *mystery* of Christ, a new entity (called a spiritual building, and a holy temple in the Lord) which is the church, would be comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. The key emphasis of Chapter 2 was *union*. The three paragraphs of chapter 2 focused specifically on union with Christ, and union with spiritual Israel.
- B. These truths led Paul to begin to level a prayer (the second prayer of the letter; the first is found in 1:15-23). This second prayer was the thought he began to express in 3:1. But he digressed in 3:2, and the digression has carried us through an entire paragraph, which we finished studying last week.
- C. Now, we will move into the actual prayer which he began in 3:1. This prayer occupies another paragraph of the text, following which comes a benediction (which we will examine next week, Lord willing).

II. TEXT: EPHESIANS 3:14-19

- A. *verse 14* = Paul restarts his initial thought, began in verse 1. He explains that the truths in Chapter 2 cause him to lift up a prayer.
 1. “**For this reason...**” = This is the same exact Greek phrase used in 3:1. We noted that there are only three times in all of the New Testament that this phrase is used (*see* 3:1, 14; Titus 1:15). It seems to be a “Paulism.” But in this case, the phrase is useful because it connects us to his original thought, the one he began to express in 3:1 before his digression in 3:2.
 2. “**...I bow my knees before the Father...**” = This phrase functions, grammatically, as what is called a “merism.” The thing Paul actually does is **pray**. Sometimes when Paul prayed, he would remain standing. But often he would kneel to pray. And so in this case, he uses the action of kneeling to express the actual activity: **prayer**. Essentially, Paul used the description of an occasional part of the activity to express the activity itself. That is the definition of a merism. And so Paul clarifies that his original thought, began in 3:1, was a prayer.
- B. *verse 15* = Having mentioned the **Father**, to whom he prays, Paul makes a descriptive statement about the **Father** that relates Paul’s prayer to the truth expounded in 2:11-22.
 1. “**...from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name...**” = There is a slight play on words here from the previous verse, that we should note. The word translated **Father** (Gr. *pater*) and the word translated **family** (Gr. *patria*) sound almost identical in Greek. Paul is not only saying that every family on earth derives its “name” from the Father. He also uses here the “name” of the Father (*pater*) to name every family (Gr. *patria*).

The point of the statement is that although the Jewish nation is the only nation that God has chosen for His own (in that sense, they are unique), God is the creator of all ethnic families of the sons of Adam (*cf.* Acts 17:24-31).

C. *verse 16* = Paul now begins to express three desires, for which he prays on behalf of the Ephesians. Each of these three desires (*cf.* 3:16, 18, 19b) begins with the Greek conjunction *hina*.

1. “...that...according to the riches of His glory...” = Although the NASB has translated this phrase correctly, and in accordance with the Greek word order, I think it is helpful to break up the thought in its logical pieces. Paul is about to ask for strength from God for the Ephesians. But note the source of that strength: **the riches of His glory**. The phrase begins with the word *kata*, rather than *ex*. This is very important. Paul asks strength **according to** God’s riches...not **out of** them.

If I possess a billion dollars, and one day you come and ask me for help buying a new car, I can approach the request three ways. **First**, I might simply refuse to help. **Second**, I might say, “What car do you want to buy, and how much do you need?” When you tell me what you need, I give you the funds you requested. This would be providing resources **out of** my riches. Or **third**, I might simply hand you my bank card and tell you to get whatever you want regardless of what it costs or requires of me. This would be providing resources **according to** my riches. When I provide **according to** my riches, I am adopting the posture that what is mine is yours; or more precisely, whatever I have is at your disposal. You are free to use whatever you need, whenever you need it, however often you need it.

But obviously the ability of the needy one to draw on the resources of another, is limited by the resources of the other. If I only have a billion dollars, you can only spend a billion dollars. If I have ten billion, you could spend ten billion. So I can only provide **according to** what I have available.

This is the point. What does God have available? What are His riches? How much **glory** is in His account and therefore at my disposal? Do you see the weight of what Paul says here?

2. “...that He would grant you...to be strengthened...” = This is the first request from Paul’s prayer in this passage. He prays for **strength** (verb from Gr. *kratos*) for the Ephesians. This prayer request will form the basis for the command at the end of this letter (*cf.* Ephesians 6:10-17, where the word is used twice; *see* 6:10, “strength,” and 6:12, “world forces,” where it is a compound word). It is important to realize that we are in a spiritual battle, and that we are not fighting against flesh, but against wicked spiritual forces. It is equally important to realize that the divine strength to combat these forces does not come from our flesh, but from God (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 10:3-4).
3. “...with power through His Spirit in the inner man...” = And here is the means by which God’s glory-riches are available to us as a source of powerful strength. The mighty Spirit of God imparts power (Gr. *dynamis*) into our **inner man**. It is the **inner man**, not the **outer man** that is being renewed. You may sometimes get a supernatural burst of physical energy. But that’s not what Paul is asking for. He is asking for strength from God’s Spirit for the Ephesians, so that regardless of what their outer man feels (tired, cranky, weak, etc.), their inner man will be strengthened. So often, living in this physical world, we equate strength from God as outward, physical strength. And if we don’t feel “God’s power” in the outer man, we excuse our bad behavior by saying that God just didn’t seem to help in that case. But most often, God’s supernatural enabling and strengthening doesn’t come to the outer man. It comes to the inner man (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 4:7-18). And that is where we find our strength. I can’t always help what my outer man is feeling. But I can certainly decide what effect that outer man’s decaying will have on my behavior and speech. Important to remember!

D. *verse 17* = Paul now expresses the reason that we need strength in the inner man, strength that comes from God’s Spirit: because it is through this **inner man** strengthening that Christ’s indwelling is made active and effective through faith, which roots me and grounds me in love.

NOTE: This verse is translated poorly in most English versions. The phrase, “*and that you...*” in the middle of the verse, which is a translation of *hina* again, is actually at the beginning of verse 18 in the Greek. A better translation for 3:17-18 would thus be: “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, you being rooted and grounded in love; so that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints...”

1. “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” = We know that Christ dwells in our hearts (*cf.* John 14:23). And we also know that His promise is never to leave us (*cf.* Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5). So the question is not whether Christ will leave my heart if I lack faith, or inner strength from the Spirit. He won’t. He promises, and that settles the issue. Instead, the question is whether I will be able to appropriate that truth and put it into action, without the

strengthening, enabling power of the Spirit. Without the Spirit's strength, I quickly lose my hold on biblical truth, and the result is that I'm cast into doubt and weakness.

2. **"...being rooted and grounded in love..."** = The word translated "rooted" (Gr. *rhizoo*) is only used twice in the New Testament (here, and Colossians 2:7). In a plant, the roots provide two things: stability and ability. The deeper the roots are, the more stable and secure the plant is in the soil. And the deeper the roots are, the better access the plant has to water and nutrients so that it has the best chance to grow properly. The word translated "grounded" (Gr. *themelioo*). This word could use a little elaboration, so let's examine another use of it in the New Testament.
 - a. *Matthew 7:24-27* = Here is a very familiar teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. We even have a children's song about it: "The wise man built his house upon the rock, house upon the rock, house upon the rock..." The contrast here is between the wise man (7:24-25) and the foolish man (7:26-27). Both built houses, and we can assume for the sake of the story that both used the same materials. The houses themselves were of the same quality. The difference was the bedrock upon which they were built. The foolish man built on sand, the wise man built on rock. In good times, both worked fine and functioned well. But things do not always go well, and times are not always good. Soon, rain began to fall, floods came, and winds began to "slam" against the houses. It was in these *bad times* that the difference became obvious...and deadly. The foolish man's house "fell...and great was its fall." By contrast, the wise man's house "did not fall, for it had been **founded** [here's our word, Gr. *themelioo*] on the rock." This is a very helpful explanation of the meaning of the word, I think.

In Christ's story, the **rock** upon which the wise man **founded** his house was obedience to Christ's words. This is appropriate in light of Christ's audience, many of whom were still lost in sin. But in the passage before us from Ephesians, Paul is writing to believers in Christ (*cf.* Ephesians 1:1*b*). And in that context, the **rock** upon which our faith is built is **love**, specifically God's great **love** for us as demonstrated in the offering of Christ for our sin-debt. Paul has already made reference to this in Ephesians 2:4-5.

And so the first thing Paul prays for the Ephesians in this passage, is that God would grant them strength in the inner man through God's Spirit. This supply of strength is available to us from God's bank account full of glory, from which we can draw funds as often and as much as we need. And the result of such strength in the inner man is that we are reminded, by faith, of Christ's indwelling presence in our hearts. This reminding serves to drive our roots deep into the soil of God's love, where they can draw stability and nourishment. It also serves to fix our lives firmly on the unwavering, indestructible bedrock of God's love.

- E. *verse 18* = Paul here expresses the second desire for which he prays to God on behalf of the Ephesians. This second request runs from 3:18, through the first part of 3:19.
 1. **"...and that you...with all the saints..."** = For the sake of clarity, I have placed the thought in a more logical sequence for us. Paul is about to ask for the Ephesians, from God, the power to **comprehend** something. But this is not a truth that he wants only the **saints who are at Ephesus** (*cf.* Ephesians 1:1) to comprehend. He wants **all the saints** to have the strength to comprehend the truth he is about to reveal.
 2. **"...may be able to comprehend..."** = This phrase is actually two verbs next to each other in Greek. The first, translated **may be able** (Gr. *exischuo*) is another variation of the same idea expressed in Paul's first desire, namely **strength**. Although this exact Greek verb is only used here in the New Testament, it is from the word for strength (Gr. *ischys*).
 - a. *Matthew 12:29* = Jesus uses the word here, and the translators of the NASB translate it with "strong."
 - b. *Ephesians 6:10* = Here in the phrase, "...in the strength of His might..." Paul uses both words he has just used in 3:16-18. The word **strength** here is the Greek *kratos*, used in 3:16. And the word **might** here is the Greek *ischys* used in 3:18. You can see how closely related they are. So in both requests, Paul is asking strength from God for the Ephesians (and for **all the saints**).
 3. **"...to comprehend..."** = The second verb of the phrase is also very interesting. It is a compound word, derived from the Greek word *lambano*, which means "to take," or "to receive." The idea

expressed here is that there is a truth which **all the saints** need to take firm hold of. But doing so will require an enablement of **strength** or **might** from the Spirit of God. What is this truth we are to take hold of? (I think it's gonna rock your world!)

4. “...what is the breadth and length and height and depth...” = There is something (Paul hasn't clarified exactly what, yet) that is easy to take at face value, and just skim the surface. It's easy to sit on the top of the ocean, and never know what's below! But Paul wants us to have the strength to take hold of just how **broad**, how **long**, how **high** and how **deep** this ocean really is. The *surface* of this ocean is huge, both **broad** and **long**. And the *volume* of this ocean is also huge, both **high** and **deep**. In fact, in the following verse where Paul finishes his thought, he says that the exact measurement and volume of this ocean is incomprehensible to the human mind. It literally **surpasses knowledge**. What is this ocean?
- F. *verse 19* = Paul completes the second prayer request, and expresses the third and final one as well.
1. “...and to know the love of Christ...” = Here is the incomprehensible ocean. Christ's love for me is a vast ocean which is so **broad**, so **long**, so **high** and so **deep** that it goes beyond what my finite mind can know or comprehend. And this is exactly why Paul must pray for an enabling strength from God's Spirit on behalf of the Ephesians, so that they would have the necessary means to take firm hold of this truth. Such a simple truth, and yet so mind-blowing, so earth-shattering, so incomprehensibly vast, so life-changing!
 2. “...which surpasses knowledge...” = In 1:18-19, Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians was that their heart-eyes would be given light, to see three things: the hope of God's calling; the rich glory of their inheritance; and the **surpassing greatness of God's power at work in them**. In the last phrase, the words used there start to stack up in a rather overwhelming way. And when we studied the passage, we noted that this was “hyper, mega, dynamite power” at work in them. The same word translated **surpassing** there (Gr. *hyper*) is used here as well. This truth goes **hyper** beyond what we can understand. It is **uber**-truth (*uber* is the German translation of the same Greek word, *hyper*). In a real sense, the most profound truth we will ever encounter is also the simplest: “Jesus loves me, this I know.”

Incidentally, the passage from 1:18-19 references this hyper-mega-dynamite power as it is manifested through the working of the **strength of His might** when He raised Christ from the dead. These two words, **strength** and **might** are the same words used in our passage tonight, and again in 6:10 (Gr. *kratos* and *ischys*).

3. “...that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” = And here, finally, is the third and last request of Paul to God for the Ephesians. These two Greek words (*pleroo*, **fill**; and *pleroma*, **fullness**) have also been used by Paul already in the letter. This was in 1:23, where Paul referred to the church of Christ as **His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all**. There, he said that the corporate church was the fullness of God. Here, he prays that individual believers would be filled up with God's fullness. These truths are so impactful when they are taken in deeply. The expression of them through Paul's mouth in these verses is breathtaking and almost overwhelming.

May God grant us the request of Paul's prayer in these verses; and may the fulfillment of these requests be made manifest in our conduct, speech and attitude as we live our lives! All glory to God alone!

III. REFLECT AND CONNECT

- A. Since the study went a little longer than usual tonight, I want us to reflect in a slightly different way. First, let me read to you the text of a great old hymn on this very subject, a hymn derived in fact from this very text of Scripture:

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell. The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win. His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.

When all of time shall pass away, and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall; when men who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call; God's love so sure, shall still endure, all measureless and strong. Redeeming grace to Adam's race—the saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.

- B. **Sing with me!** Will you join me in another, very simple song with profound consequences?

Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so!
Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong.

Chorus

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so!

Jesus loves me, He who died, heaven's gate to open wide.
He will wash away my sin, and let His little child come in! (**Chorus**)

Jesus loves me, this I know, as He loved so long ago,
Taking children on His knee, saying, "Let them come to me." (**Chorus**)

IV. PRAYER