

# EPHESIANS

## Chapter 3

*Paul the Preacher to the Gentiles*

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,<sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.<sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,<sup>5</sup> which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.<sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.<sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.<sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.<sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**

**3:1–13** Having saved people individually by his grace (2:1–10), and having reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Christ (2:11–22), God also now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. This step in God’s eternal plan was not fully revealed in previous times. Paul calls it a “mystery.” (CSB)

The Early Church, surprisingly, did not universally approve of the mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15). Paul urges that Christ Himself commissioned him to fulfill God’s plan to bring the Gentiles the message of salvation through faith apart from works. (TLSB)

**3:1** *For this reason.* Because of all that God has done, explained in the preceding several verses. (CSB)

Paul is referring to the central thought developed in chapter 2, namely, the unity in Christ that brings Jews and Gentiles together into one church. He is intending to ask God to enlighten the Ephesians, to bring them to understand ever more fully just how great Christ’s love for them actually is. Paul’s prayer will end with

the request that God enable the Ephesians “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (V. 18). (PBC)

Paul became a prisoner because he took the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jewish accusers who were opposed to the Gospel and especially any efforts to incorporate the Gentiles were responsible for Paul’s arrest. There are repeated references in the history of the early church of hatred between the Jews and the Gentiles (see Acts 22:21-24; 26:12-23). (LL)

*prisoner.* Apparently Paul was under house arrest at this time (see Ac 28:16, 30). (CSB)

Arrested in AD 58 to protect him from a Jewish mob in the temple (Acts 21:27-36), Paul spent a year and a half in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32) and two years under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul rejoiced to be put on trial for the sake of the Gospel, hoping to gain legal freedom to preach it to the Gentiles (2 Tim. 2:9-10). He referred to his suffering more than once but qualified it as fulfilling the Lord’s purposes for his life and others. (TLSB)

Recall that this letter to the Ephesians was written while Paul was detained in Rome, awaiting trial for his Christian activity. He speaks of himself as imprisoned “for the sake of you Gentile.” That expression requires a bit more explanation, so before he begins his prayer, he digresses to show just how his ministry to Gentiles fits in with God’s eternal plan. (PBC)

He was probably waiting for his audience with Caesar Nero. For Paul, it was a privilege to suffer the inconvenience or even life-threatening crisis for the sake of his relationship with Christ. In this he was one with Christ who had suffered for him, and he knew his suffering would produce benefits for the church. Newspapers in 1993 carried the story of a man in Miami who was suing both his church and his pastor to get back the offerings from the previous year. The man’s pastor had promised benefits and blessings if members would tithe their income for the Lord’s work. The man tithed. The blessings didn’t come. He wanted his money back. How this attitude differs from that of St. Paul. Paul didn’t approach his faith from the perspective of gain, but from the perspective of service and sacrifice. (LL)

*of Christ.* Paul’s physical imprisonment was because he obeyed Christ in spite of opposition. After this verse Paul breaks his train of thought to explain the “mystery” (v. 4). He resumes his initial thought in v. 14. (CSB)

**3:2** Paul interrupts himself to defend his calling. Paul knows what he taught them, but uses a rhetorical technique to encourage their memory (1:13; 4:21). (TLSB)

*Surely you have heard.* Most of the Ephesians would have heard of Paul's ministry because of his long stay there earlier. However, if this was a circular letter (see note on 1:1), the other churches may not have known much about it. (CSB)

"Surely" does in no way denote uncertainty. (Buls)

"Heard" clearly shows that Paul knew these Ephesian Christians personally. (Buls)

*administration.* Paul unfolds God's administrative plan for the church and for the universe in this letter (see especially 1:3–12). He has been given a significant responsibility in the execution of this plan. (CSB)

ESV has "stewardship." Referring to a chief servant's authority to administer household goods. Christ committed the Gospel to the apostles (Luke 12:41-48; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; Titus 1:7). (TLSB)

Stoeckhardt defines it as "Paul's conduct in this office." By the way, Stoeckhardt calls verses 2-13 "an expansive description of the office of Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles." (Buls)

oikonomian – Management of a household; direction; office or stewardship. The plan of salvation (including the eternal plan from eternity through the promises of the OT to the fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the declaration/proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

GRACE – Here it means Paul's office as Apostle to the Gentiles. It was a gracious gift. It was given and it was for their sake, for their benefit. (Buls)

FOR YOU – The NIV translation of verse 2 adequately reproduces what the original says but makes it easy to miss the emphasis Paul intended. The key point lies in the last two words, "for you." We might paraphrase the verse, Surely you have heard that it was for your benefit, not mine, that God called me to administer His grace. To be sure, Paul's faithful preaching of God's grace to the Gentiles got him into trouble with his fellow Jews and put him on trial in the Roman legal system. In the final analysis, though, the office of administering God's grace to Gentiles wasn't something Paul chose for himself. It "was given to me," he declares. And so was the message. (PBC)

**3:3** *mystery.* A truth known only by divine revelation (v. 5; see Ro 16:25; see also notes on Ro 11:25; Col 1:26). Here the word "mystery" has the special meaning of the private, wise plan of God, which in Ephesians relates primarily to the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles in the new body, the church (see v. 6). It may be thought of as a secret that is temporarily hidden, but more than that, it

is a plan God is actively working out and revealing stage by stage (cf. 1:9–10; Rev 10:7). (CSB)

Paul would never have figured out his message by himself. Rather, it was a “mystery made known to (him) by revelation.” The term “mystery” is used some 20 times in the NT – most often by Paul and usually in the sense illustrated here. Paul is not speaking of something that is mysterious in the sense of being vague, murky, or hard to understand but rather something that needs to be explained. After it has been explained, it’s perfectly clear, but one would never have tumbled onto it without some outside help. Paul indicates that he received such help from God by revelation. (PBC)

What they did not see in ages past (even though it is mentioned in Isaiah 60 and in the prophet Ezekiel 33:11, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.” These words were applied to the Gentiles as well as the Jews) is the togetherness of Jew and Gentile in one body the church. The idea of Jew and Gentile as joint heirs, members of one body, sharing the promise of Christ, was a vision not held until the time of Paul. That was mystery revealed. It was as radical a vision as people in Alabama or Memphis in the 1950’s seeing whites and blacks together in the front of the bus. (LL)

*as I have already written briefly.* May refer to 1:9–10. (CSB)

Probably referring to the first part of this Letter (1:9-10; 2:11-22). (TLSB)

REVELATION – apokalupsin - A disclosure of what has been hidden or covered. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Paul received the Gospel from Christ Himself, including the commission to preach it to Gentiles (Gal. 1:12, 16) (TLSB)

**3:4** IN READING THIS – Public reading in the Divine Service (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13). (TLSB)

Stoeckhardt: In verses 4 Paul is referring again to what he had written in 2:11-22, namely that through Christ the Gentiles has been brought near and had become fellow citizens with the saints and members of the very family of God.” (Buls)

ABLE TO UNDERSTAND – anagivwskovtes - To gain insight into with the mind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Bengel says: “This book is very sublime, and yet it is given to all to read...Paul wrote more plainly and sublimely in this epistle, than in any other before.” (Buls)

MYSTERY OF CHRIST – From this train of thought it is evident that the mystery (v. 3) and the mystery of Christ (v. 4) are not merely Christian truth or Christian doctrine in general but is the participation of the Gentiles in Christ's kingdom. In the parallel passage, Col. 1:27, Paul call this mystery, which was first hidden but is now made manifest the "mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you." (ol. 4:3). (Stoeckhardt)

**3:5** *not made known to men in other generations.* See note on v. 6.

Stoeckhardt: "Even the Prophets of the OT had prophesied of the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom of the Messiah, but these prophesies had not become generally known to the very people who were concerned, the Gentiles throughout the world. (Buls)

Though Paul received a special vision of Christ (v. 3), the other apostles received no less spiritual revelation and commission through Christ (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). (TLSB)

REVEALS – When God "reveals" his "mysterious secret," he does not "pull the covers off" but snuggles under the covers with us; incarnation (John 1:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*holy.* Set apart for God's service. (CSB)

Though all Christians are holy before God through Baptism, the apostles and prophets are set apart for a unique office (Rom. 1:1). (Cf. Eph. 2:20; 4:11). (TLSB)

*apostles and prophets.* See note on 2:20. Although Paul was the chief recipient, others received this revelation also. (CSB)

Thus Peter and James at the apostolic council (Acts 15), testified that God wanted to gather together for himself a people from the Gentiles. And what God revealed to them the apostles then –for which reasons they are also called – published further and proclaimed to the world. (Stoeckhardt)

**3:6** MYSTERY – The key to the mystery revealed to Paul lies in the expression "together," used three times. Actually, in the original Greek the "together" idea is found in the noun. One could reflect that by using English compound words with co-. Paul was given to understand that through faith in Christ Gentiles are co-heirs with believing Jews, co-members of one and the same body, that is, the church, and co-sharers with Israel in the salvation that Christ's merit has won. This equality between Jews and Gentiles is parallel to what Paul preciously talked about when he stated that Christ's saving purpose in reconciling the world was "to create in Himself one new man out of two" (2:15). (PBC)

A word of caution is in order so that we don't misunderstand Paul's words and jump to the conclusion that Gentiles couldn't be saved or that God wasn't interested in them during OT times. Recall that God through the OT prophet Ezekiel said, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (33:11). These words applied to Gentiles as well as Jews. (PBC)

*together ... together ... together.* The repetition of this word indicates the unique aspect of the mystery that was not previously known: the equality and mutuality that Gentiles had with Jews in the church, the one body. That Gentiles would turn to the God of Israel and be saved was prophesied in the OT (see Ro 15:9–12); that they would come into an organic unity with believing Jews on an equal footing was unexpected. (CSB)

The apostle heaps up the expressions in order very strongly to call attention to the full and equal sharing of privileges by the Gentiles with the rest of the saints. The Gentile Christians are incorporated into the same body, into the body of Christ, into the one holy Christian Church, and so also co-share in the promise of future salvation, are with all God's children heirs of eternal life. (Stoekhardt)

*heirs.* See note on 1:18. (CSB)

Paul strongly emphasizes the togetherness of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. (TLSB)

SHARERS – sugklaronoma – Inheriting together, fellow heirs, coheirs; joint share holders, equal heirs, equally belonging. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

The promise of Abraham, "In you and in your seeds shall all the families of the earth be blessed." They did not get this blessing indirectly through the Jew, or by becoming Jews, but directly, as Gentiles; they became fellow-heirs, fellow-members, and fellow partakers "in Christ Jesus." Enjoying all privileges in him in a state of union and fellowship with him. To this state they are invited and admitted through the gospel. (PC)

PROMISE – The pledge or promises (all of them) given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendents, stressing full equality of Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians; God has no "step-children." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:7 BECAME A SERVANT** – ESV has "minister." One entrusted with the office of preaching the Gospel. Paul was called by Christ Himself. (TLSB)

He wasn't one originally. Paul always remained painfully aware that earlier in his career as an ardent Pharisee he had been violently opposed to Christ and a vicious persecutor of Christians. On one occasion, while on his way to

Damascus to conduct a raid on Christians in that city, the risen Christ confronted Paul on the road. He literally knocked him to the ground and brusquely rebuked him. (Acts 9:1-5). (PBC)

BY...GOD'S GRACE GIVEN ME – Here Paul sees grace bringing him the power necessary to preach the Gospel. Grace also equips us for ministry. (LL)

That God, in His grace and mercy, makes the unwilling willing, not by mere brute force but by effectual, powerful grace, is indeed a deep mystery. Stoeckhardt remarks on this verse: “In verse 7 the specific grace which God has bestowed upon him is this, that through him and his service the Gospel is to be made known among the Gentiles. In speaking of this he calls attention to the fact that in this his service of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles the effectual working of God’s power is demonstrated. The transcendent greatness of God’s power and might is effective both in those who preach and in those who hear and believe the Gospel. 1:19.” (Buls)

energeian – The operation, action, activity; energy/energize; divine empowerment energizes to evangelize. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:8** *less than the least*. Cf. 1Ti 1:15. Paul never ceased to be amazed that one so unworthy as he should have been chosen for so high a task. His modesty was genuine, even though we may disagree with his self-evaluation. (CSB)

Reference not to Paul’s abilities but to his persecution of the Church (Ac 8:1–3; Gal 1:13; 1Tm 1:15). (TLSB)

Not only of apostles and prophets, but even of all believers – a profound expression of humility, founded not only on his persecuting career, but on his consciousness of sin, of inborn rebellion against God’s Law. (PC)

*grace*. In this case, a special endowment that brings responsibility for service. (CSB)

The gift proceeding from God’s graciousness. (TLSB)

*to preach*. Lit. “to gospelize”; parallels “to make plain” (v. 9). (CSB)

Notice how the ministry of the apostles is identified with the ministry of our Lord himself.

The two infinitives (to preach, to make plain) do not refer to separate or different things, but together they explain and define what Paul’s underserved gift was. (PBC)

*unsearchable*. Far beyond what we can know, but not beyond our appreciation—at least in part (cf. Ro 11:33). (CSB)

Stoeckhardt: “They literally defy search and discovery.” He quotes Hofmann: “There are no footprints leading to them which man may follow in order to find them. The Apostolic message alone reveals them.” (Buls)

RICHES – Stoeckhardt: “The riches of Christ consist in the fullness of salvation of all those spiritual, heavenly blessings gained by Christ’s merits which have been enumerated in the first section of this Letter. (Buls)

anezichniaston – Incomprehensible or inscrutable. No one can ever exhaust the depths of the Gospel in the person and work of Jesus Christ, for it is a treasure – house of grace, vastly beyond all human comprehension. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Conveying the idea of the things that are most precious being infinitely abundant. Usually precious things are rare; their very rarity increases their price; but here that which is most precious is also boundless – riches of compassion and love, of merit, of sanctifying, comforting, and transforming power, all without limit, and capable of satisfying every want, craving and yearning of the heart, now and evermore. (PC)

**3:9 MAKE PLAIN TO EVERYONE** – Paul was presented in verse 8 as a missionary. Now he is presented as the universal theologian who brings out the profoundest implications of the Gospel and enlightens the whole church.

phwtisai - Give light, light up, illuminate, shine light on. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Paul is the founder and organizer of the Gentile Church. Later missionary activity among the Gentiles is a continuation of the great work of the first unique missionary to the Gentiles, who filled the Orient and the Occident with Gospel of Christ. Just now, as Paul is writing this letter, as he has nearly completed his apostolic career, is this economy really brought to light. (Stoeckhardt)

KEPT HIDDEN IN GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS – It has been in the mind of the creator and inherent in creation since the beginning. Notice how creation and redemption are tied together here. The created order is also God’s and part of his plan of salvation.

ajpokekrummevnou – Kept secret. The revelation of God is the answer to life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:10 now**. In contrast to the “ages past” (v. 9). (CSB)



*through the church.* The fact that God had done the seemingly impossible—reconciling and organically uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church—makes the church the perfect means of displaying God’s wisdom. (CSB)

The very existence of a Church in which Jews and Gentiles are united stands as a testimony to Christ’s victory over the devil’s divisive schemes. (TLSB)

*manifold.* Variegated or multifaceted (in the way that many facets of a diamond reflect and enhance its beauty). (CSB)

Many-sided, multi-faceted; displaying God’s wisdom before the intelligences of the heavenly order. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

God had separated a people from corrupt mankind, while He permitted the Gentiles to go their own ways. That was Israel. However, not all those who descended from Abraham according to the flesh were true children. But within Abraham’s seed there was a holy seed, true Israel. Also in the times of deepest apostasy the Lord retained for Himself a remnant, an election of grace. And in the midst of the Jewish people God had prepared the salvation of the world. When the time was fulfilled, God called Jews and Gentiles into the Fellowship of Christ. Indeed, the majority of the Jews hardened. But how wonderful! The unbelief, the hardening and rejection of Israel had to serve to bring to faith and save the Gentiles. This divine wisdom, which by means of the reverse effects the reverse. When the Jews rejected the Word of salvation, the apostles then turned to the Gentiles. On the other hand, the faith of the Gentiles incited and incites the Jews to emulation. This is divine wisdom that opposite things and means, as faith and unbelief, have the same effect, resulting in enlarging the congregation of believers. And so on it goes unto the end, until the fullness has been reached, until the number of the elect is fulfilled. (Stoeckhardt)

SHOULD BE MADE KNOWN – gnoqisthan - To reveal. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*rulers and authorities.* Christ had ascended over all these (1:20–21). It is a staggering thought that the church on earth is observed, so to speak, by these spiritual powers and that to the degree the church is spiritually united it portrays to them the wisdom of God. This thought may be essential in understanding the meaning of “calling” in 4:1. (CSB)

Stoeckhardt: “The principalities and powers that are mentioned here appear as the witnesses and admirers of the wisdom of God, which is made known through the Church. (Buls)

*heavenly realms.* See note on 1:3. (CSB)

Stoeckhardt: These heavenly spirits rejoice to see this glorious work of humanity there is built up that holy, perfect temple of God.” We are reminded of Luke 15:7, 10 which informs us that angels rejoice each time a sinner repents. We are reminded of 1 Peter 1:12 which tells us that the angels desire to look into the mysteries of redemption. We are reminded of Heb. 1:14 which tells us that God is constantly sending them to serve us. What fascinates the angels? The Gospel. The world treads on it as nothing. Sometimes even the church does that. We live in a world of sin, confusion, disappointment, lack of justice, opposition, seeming impossibilities. But the Gospel is God’s many-sided wisdom. Lenski remarks: “It weaves a thousand apparently tangled threads into one glorious pattern.” (Buls)

In the Preface of our communion liturgy we say: “Therefore, with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name...” (LL)

**3:11 ACCORDING TO** – Kata means “in keeping with.” How far back does the kata phrase go? All the way back to the beginning of verse 8. (Buls)

*eternal purpose.* The effective headship of Christ over a united church is in preparation for his ultimate assumption of headship over the universe (1:10). (CSB)

This denotes both election and the mystery of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. God’s eternal purposes are always, always, IN CHRIST JESUS, never apart from Him. (Buls)

The great saving plan of God as praised in 1:3-14. (TLSB)

All periods of history have made their contribution to this eternal purpose and plan of God. Notice how God works in history to bring about redemption and the unity of humanity.

prothesin - A plan or will. Through everything that time and life brings about, God carefully prepared a plan for the complete fulfillment of his eternal will. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

The apostle is ever anxious that we should connect these operations of God with the profundity, deliberation, and awfulness of an eternal decree, and that we should thus contrast them in our minds with many even of the most important works of man which are often determined on his part, by a passing event or other trivial cause. (PC)

**3:12 THROUGH FAITH IN HIM** – This epistle again stresses the personal relationship with God I Christ that makes all this happen. Our faith is not just

“personal,” however, but is part of the design of the universe itself. For this God created us.

WE – Paul includes himself (a Jew) with the Ephesian Gentiles. For both groups the barriers have been taken away in Christ – barriers between one another, but even more important, barriers between the sinner and God. (PBC)

WITH FREEDOM AND CONFIDENCE – We Christians now stand in the right relation to God. We have an openness of heart toward God, an approach to God with confidence. Comforted and with all assurance we can approach God as dear children approach their dear father. This relation to God is mediated objectively through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, subjectively through faith in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

parrasan – Courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

MAY APPROACH – prosagogan – To have access. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Christians can pray personally to the Father. (TLSB)

CONFIDENCE – pepoithasei – Trust. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:13** NOT BE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE OF MY SUFFERINGS –Glory and suffering go hand in hand (Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:17). Here Paul suffers, Christ-like, for the sake of the Gentiles (2 Cor. 4:12; Col. 1:24). Paul endured the suffering so that he might continue to minister to the needs of his fellow believers, resulting in their strengthening. (TLSB)

Stoeckhardt paraphrases this passage: “Do not allow your joy because of the blessing to be chilled or to be changed to discouragement and depression because of my suffering, my tribulation which I suffer for your sake, which after all belongs to my office and is not a disgrace, but an honor bestowed upon you.” (Buls)

**3:1–13** Paul defends his call as an apostle by emphasizing its basis in the Gospel. Though our personal credentials are important, our service is based on God’s gifts and calling, which stem from the Gospel. • Lord, lead me to serve according to Your gifts and calling, rather than by my reason or strength. Amen. (TLSB)

### *A Prayer for the Ephesians*

**<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom his whole family <sup>a</sup> in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious**

riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

**3:14–21** Paul now expresses a prayer that grows out of his awareness of all that God is doing in believers. God’s key gifts are “power” (vv. 16, 18, 20) and “love” (vv. 17–19). (CSB)

Immediately preceding our text, Paul acknowledges that he has been privy to the mystery that Gentiles are fellow heirs of the Gospel. His call as an ambassador to the Gentiles serves as the backdrop to his prayer for the Gentiles in our text. After our text, Paul urges the members of God’s Church to live in such a way that reflects the unity established by God through Christ. The nature of the blessings prayed for in our text (strength, love, and comprehension) all facilitate such ecclesiastical unity. A growth in strength, love, and knowledge is all possible due to God’s gracious promises, ultimately in Christ Jesus. It is the surpassing love of Christ (v 19), the love that reconciled us to God by taking him to the cross, that makes possible God’s doing for us “far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (v 20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

**3:14-15** Resumes the thought begun in verse 1. (TLSB)

Paul digressed to explain the mystery that God had revealed to him, that in the Christian Church God is pleased to have Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ stand as equals. (PBC)

**3:14** *For this reason.* Resumes the thought of v. 1. (CSB)

Because you Gentiles have now come nigh and become fellow-citizens with all the saints and members of God’s household, I pray for you; and since I am the apostles to the Gentiles, it is a part of my office to pray for you, so that you may grow and increase in your new, spiritual, divine existence and life. (Stoeckhardt)

The unity of the Church, established by Christ, causes Paul’s prayer for strength among God’s people. Division weakens. Unity strengthens. It is appropriate, then, that Paul introduces this independent variable of unity as a precursor and producer of the dependent variable—strength among God’s people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*I kneel.* Expresses deep emotion and reverence, as people in Paul's day usually stood to pray. (CSB)

The normal Jewish and early Christian posture for prayer was standing (Mt. 6:5; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11). Kneeling for prayer (Dan. 6:10; Luke 22:41; Acts 9:40) suggests submission and worship (Phil. 2:10) (TLSB)

Bow – Synonymous with worship toward God (Ex. 4:31; 34:8; Ps. 95:6; 1 Sam. 1:28) or respect and service for a human being (Gen. 33:3; 43:26-28; 1 Sam. 20:41; 28:14 Esther 3:2). God expressly forbade bowing to false gods (Ex. 20:4-5). People also bow to (1) greet someone (Gen. 18:2; 19:1), (2) signal humility and repentance (Ezra 9:5; 10:1), and (3) express thanks (Gen. 24:52). Bows were done in a variety of ways (1 Chron. 29:20; 1 Kings 18:42; Neh. 8:6) and likely included tilting the head, tilting the upper body, kneeling with one's face to the ground, or lying prostrate. The more elaborate the bow, the greater the expression of devotion or emotion (cf. 33:3). (p. 1276 TLBSB)

This is an emphatic way of denoting prayers; but not incidental, occasional prayer, inspired by some passing feeling; the attitude denotes deliberate prayer, making a business of it, approaching God reverence. (PC)

**3:15** *family.* The word in Greek is similar to the word for "father" (see NIV text note), so it can be said that the "family" derives its name (and being) from the "father." God is our Father, and we can commit our prayers to him in confidence. (CSB)

Best renders by "he who is the true Father of all who are children." The family on earth – Christians – in heaven it includes the angels and saints. (Stoeckhardt)

*pasa patria*, "every family" or "the whole family." The family here refers to the Church. Not only is God our Father by creation, but he is also our Father by salvation. This soteriological source of family emphasizes again the unity of the Christian Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

**3:16-21** This prayer consists essentially of three petitions followed by a doxology, a statement of praise to God. Paul asks God to grant the Ephesians strength, knowledge, and fullness. (PBC)

These, however, are not three isolated or separate things. They all hang together. We could connect and expand them a bit by putting them together into one sentence such as, Paul prays that God would strengthen (16) the new man in the Ephesians, in order that they would come to know (19) the greatness of Christ's love and so gain a deeper realization of the fullness (19) that is theirs as members of God's family. (PBC)

**3:16 HIS GLORIOUS RICHES** – God’s standard of giving is liberal, bountiful, overflowing. An image of the riches of his glory is seen in the starry heavens, which proclaim at once the vast riches and surpassing glory of God. Or in the beautiful appearance of an autumn sunset, where the whole sky is fleshed with clouds brightened into a sea of glory. (PC)

Christians continually take from this kindness after kindness and all that is good. (Stoeckhardt)

**STRENGTHEND YOU WITH POWER** – This means that Christians might find themselves equipped with courage and vitality for all the tasks ahead.

Paul requests that God would give the Ephesians strength – spiritual strength, which comes only through the Holy Spirit. Causing Christ to dwell in believers’ hearts is the real work of the Holy Spirit. (PBC)

In the knowledge of Christ’s love (vv. 18-19). (TLSB)

In the doctrine of *genus majesticum*, we claim that the divine nature is communicated to the human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. In Paul’s prayer, he asks that God share his divine characteristics (as much as our finite existence can hold) as a source of blessing and strength to the Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

**INNER BEING** – This is our mind and our heart. It is our conscience, our will, and our commitments. The actions we take, as Jesus said, flow from the inside out (Luke 6:43-45). (LL)

The Spirit’s work affects the “inner being,” that is, the new man created when the Ephesians were brought to faith. This new man grows as the Spirit continues to work in believers through Word and Sacrament, making them ever more sure and confident of their salvation as Faith in Christ grows. (PBC)

The renewed nature in the Christian that battles against the sinful nature (4:24; 2 Cor. 4:16). (TLSB)

**3:17 dwell.** Be completely at home. Christ was already present in the Ephesian believers’ lives (cf. Ro 8:9). (CSB)

Since baptized Christians are in Christ (Gal. 3:27), Christ dwells by the Spirit in them (Rom. 8:10; Gal. 2:20). Paul’s prayer is that He would continue to dwell in them, and that they would trust in Him. (TLSB)

This is the blessed and wonderful mystical union. He is in us and we are in Him: this the inner communion between Christ and the Christians. When become believers, when we grasped Christ in faith, Christ in and with His Spirit entered into our heart. But the chief concern in the Christian’s life is that they become

strengthened in faith and that Christ through faith ever wins more and more room in their heart. For this should every Christian himself pray to God from day to day. (Stoeckhardt)

It means to make a permanent home. (LL)

If we are to comprehend the full scope of God's purposes, we need both the inward strengthening of the Holy Spirit and the uninterrupted communion with Christ as he dwells within us.

In the doctrine of *genus majesticum*, we claim that the divine nature is communicated to the human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. In Paul's prayer, he asks that God share his divine characteristics (as much as our finite existence can hold) as a source of blessing and strength to the Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*hearts*. The whole inner being. (CSB)

THROUGH FAITH – This aspect of faith uses Martin Luther's favorite word for faith, *fiducia*. It means a relationship of trust, in which we stake our very lives on Christ. ((LL)

The instrument by which this indwelling is attained. (PC)

ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED – Both of these verbs are perfect passive, indicating something which has already happened and is continuing as a stable and constant condition.

That of a tree and that of a building, denoting what is both a starting point and the support of the Christian's love. (PC)

IN LOVE – This is *agape* love which is purely unconditional, intentionally sacrificial, expressive in both word and action, and enduring, as in the case of Christ, even to death on the cross. (LL)

It is implied that the Christian life can begin and flourish only in such an atmosphere as warm sunshine needed to start and advance the life of plant, so love is needed to start and carry on the life of the soul. (PC)

**3:18** TO GRASP – The highest knowledge of God is not personal achievement. It is given to the community of believers and is available only to the individuals who share in the life of that community. We are not plugged into God on our own private wire.

WIDE...LONG...HIGH AND DEEP – What building could this be other than the one concerning which it was said in Ephesians 2:19-22 that the readers with

all saints belong to it? In width it stretches east and west far over the nations of the earth. In length it extends through all times unto the end things. In height it reaches into the heights of heaven where Christ lives, embracing the hosts of God's angels in heaven, who according to Ephesians 1:10 are united with God's children on earth and who together form the whole family in heaven and on the earth, 3:15. (Stoeckhardt)

**3:19** *surpasses knowledge*. Not unknowable, but so great that it cannot be completely known. (CSB)

The immeasurability of God's wisdom and Christ's love (Job 11:5-9; Rom. 11:33). Knowledge of Christ is praised in the Letter, but the human mind cannot fully comprehend Him. (TLSB)

The Ephesians experienced that marvelous love in their own lives, but they had only begun to learn about it. Paul now prays that God would enable them to grasp or understand the full extent of Christ's love. Paul suggests that the Ephesians think of how Christ's loves stretches out in directions to embrace "all saints," that is, every believer who ever lived. For each believer of all time, in every place, Christ has done exactly the same as He did for the Ephesians, so great is His love for so many people who were so worthless and unworthy of being saved. (PBC)

*gnōnai . . . hyperballousan tēs gnōseōs*, "to know . . . surpasses knowledge." Existence, as well as its accompanying experience, is not contingent upon knowledge. But knowledge can make the experience of being part of God's Church more profound and profitable. This knowledge can also direct our hearts and minds to the source of this salutatory experience—God our Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*fullness*. God, who is infinite in all his attributes, allows us to draw on his resources—in this case, his love. (CSB)

"The whole world with all diligence has struggled to figure out what God is, what He has in mind and does. Yet the world has never been able to grasp the knowledge and understanding of any of these things. But here we have everything in richest measure" (LC II 63). (TLSB)

God, of course, is total "fullness." He created everything; He owns everything; He controls everything. And yet, He allows us, His dear children, to come boldly to Him. In fact, He invites us to pray confidently, assuring us that He will hear. Paul's prayer is a model of bold prayer. There is nothing bashful about his request. He doesn't ask for just a few crumbs; he asks for the whole loaf. His request is that the Ephesians "may be filled to the measure of all fullness of God." We might say that he is asking that the Ephesians be filled to overflowing with all good things that God dispenses through His Church. (PBC)



**3:20-21** The prayer and the first half of the Letter reach their high point in a doxology. (TLSB)

**3:20** *immeasurably more*. Has specific reference to the matters presented in this section of Ephesians but is not limited to these. (CSB)

”God’s giving is not limited by our asking. “He is like an eternal, unending fountain. The more it pours forth and overflows, the more it continues to give. God desires nothing more seriously from us than that we ask Him for much and great things (LC III 56). (TLSB)

At work in the church today is a low expectation of God. We expect little from God, it seems, and by our lack of prayer and planning, we end up fulfilling our own low expectations. It’s not unlike the man who had a flat tire in the middle of the night. He pulled to the side of the road and saw a farmhouse off in the distance. He decided to walk to the house and ask to borrow the lug wrench he himself did not have. It was late, and he was sure the farmer would not want to help him. So sure was he that all along the way he talked to himself about the farmer. “He’ll probably be angry that I have awakened him...No doubt he’ll complain about how often people come to him for help...He probably never loans tools to strangers...He’ll likely say I should have called for assistance,” he thought out loud. By the time he reached the farmhouse he was so worked up that he threw a rock through the window of the farmer and exclaimed, “You can keep your lousy lug wrench. I don’t want it anyway! (LL)

*tōi de dunamenōi huper panta poiēsai huper ekperissou hōn aitoumetha ē nooumen*, “now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.” The previous verses strongly point to God’s willingness to have already made us his own. This verse reminds us that he is not only willing but also able. Using the argument from greater to lesser, we can conclude that if God is able to save us despite us, he is certainly able to provide for us more than we’ll ever know. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*his power*. See 1:19–21. (CSB)

AT WORK WITHIN US – If he can do great things with us, imagine what his real power is capable of.

**3:21** *to him be glory*. The ultimate goal of our existence (see 1:6 and note). Paul’s attitude is so different from the man with the flat tire. Paul knew the extravagance of grace, the scope of God’s love, and the power behind that love. The doxology that ends his prayer glorifies God for the power within the church that can do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” His doxology no doubt raised the expectations of Christians then as it does now. (CSB)

Paul gives glory to God, who is able to do exceeding abundantly, whose power is unlimited. Moreover, God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. We Christian are still rather weak, also in our prayers. We still do not really know what we need and what is beneficial to us, and so our prayers do ever fall short of our wants. (Rom. 8:26) But God can give us, can do unto us super-abundantly more than we desire, and this according to the power that works in us. According to His almighty power, which has quickened us from death in sins and wrought faith in us, He can also very well strengthen and sustain faith in is who are weak, infirm vessels; He can work all good unto Him be glory. (Stoeckhardt)

*hē doxa*, “glory.” Paul prays that the Church be strengthened so that God is glorified. This in no way increases God’s innate glory. It is simply an acknowledgment and recognition on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*in the church and in Christ Jesus.* A remarkable parallel. God has called the church to an extraordinary position and vocation (cf. v. 10; 4:1). (CSB)

The only NT doxology to include this phrase (cf. Romans 16:25-27; Jude 24-25), indicating the importance of the Church in this Letter. The phrase suggests public worship. (TLSB)

Yes, in the Church dwells the glory of God, resounds the praise of God, not in the outer-Christian world. The Church thanks God with hearts and hands and voices, with its entire existence for the great things which He has done and daily does unto it. (Stoeckhardt)

**3:14–21** As Paul considers God’s wisdom, grace, and love, he breaks out in prayer and praise. Study of God’s Word naturally combines with prayer and praise in the Divine Service, where Christ’s gifts are given out, and we receive them with thanksgiving. • Lord, let these verses be my prayer for my church today. Amen. (TLSB)