

Studies in Ephesians - Part 3

by William MacDonald

The sermon explores the mystery of the church, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, and the purpose of the church in demonstrating the manifold wisdom of God.

Duration: 45:59

Scripture: Ephesians 3:14

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by explaining the structure of the chapter being discussed. He points out that Paul starts off with a thought in verse 1, but gets interrupted and addresses a different subject in verses 2 through 13 before returning to his original point in verse 14. The speaker then highlights the theme of the transforming power of God, which is discussed in chapter 2. He mentions that this theme is also referenced in previous portions of the same epistle. The speaker then moves on to discuss the mystery of Christ, which is the focus of the chapter. He emphasizes that the church is a parenthesis in God's dealings and that the presentation of this truth in the Word of God is also presented as a parenthesis. Finally, the speaker introduces a prayer for power, which is found in verses 14 to 19 of chapter 3. The prayer is directed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and emphasizes the unity of the family in heaven and earth.

Transcript

This is Ephesians, Chapter 3. While you're turning, we'll just go over briefly the outline of the study last night. This could have been Chapter 2. We spoke of Chapter 2 as being an exposition of the transforming power of God. He transforms from death to life, from hedonism to the heavenly, from law-work to life-work, from distance to nearness, from entity to peace, from foreigners to fellow-citizens, and from the habitation of Satan to the habitation of God.

Now, tonight, we're just going to press on into Chapter 3, and we'll read this chapter together at this time. Ephesians, Chapter 3. For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you, how that by revelation he may know unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel, whereof I was made a minister

according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have confidence and access, boldness and access, with confidence, by the faith of him.

Wherefore I desire that ye think not of my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 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, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen. You should feel free to come afterwards, and we can reverse it back again, and you can copy it after the meeting, or perhaps some friend has it. Now let us look to see what the outline of this chapter is tonight.

First of all, I'd like to point out that Paul starts off to say something in verse 1, and then, as it were, he becomes interrupted in his train of thought, and takes up a subject in verses 2 through 13, and then in verse 14 he goes on to say what he had originally started to say. Now is that clear? For instance, he says in verse 1, For this cause I call the prisoner of Jesus Christ to you Gentiles. Now that sentence is really never finished until you get down to verse 14.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me just say it this way. Paul starts out, and he's going to say, Now for this cause I bow my knees, but then he thinks I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ to you Gentiles.

Oh yes, and that reminds him of the mission that God gave him to accomplish in connection with the Gentiles. And so in the verses from 2 through 13, he puts in what we would speak of as a parenthesis. That's really what it is, a parenthesis on the subject of the mystery, or the church.

Now this is very beautiful for this reason. The church itself is a parenthesis in God's dealings in the world. Let me explain it this way.

In the Old Testament, God had his dealings with the people, beginning with Genesis chapter 12, right down to the end of the Old Testament. Then with the coming of the New Testament, you have in the first book of Acts a parenthetical portion in God's dealings on the earth. And that parenthetical portion has to do with the church.

This is Israel. Then God takes up his dealings with the church. And Israel today is set aside, scattered throughout the earth, because of her relationship with God.

Now the church began at the day of Pentecost, and the church age will close at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, here on earth. At the end of that time, here upon the earth, where Christ reigns with Jerusalem

and over the earth, is a parenthesis in God's dealings. And the beautiful thing is that the truth of the church is presented in Ephesians as a parenthesis.

I don't know whether you've ever noticed that before or not. And so we would call the first part of our outline, A Parenthesis on the Mystery. And this will be letter E, will it not? Letter E, A Parenthesis on the Mystery.

Chapter 3, verses 1 through really 13. Alright, Paul says in this first verse, For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, the Revised says, for you Gentiles. Now this is perfectly lovely.

Paul was suffering imprisonment at the hands of the Romans. But he wouldn't admit it for a minute. You know, it has been beautifully said that although this letter was written from a prison, you don't get the slightest smell of a prison about it.

Written from a prison? Where was Paul? His body was in the prison, but he was in the heavenlies, wasn't he? He was enjoying his position that God had given him in Christ. And so he refuses to admit for a minute that he's a prisoner of Rome. Why is he in prison? Because the Lord Jesus Christ allowed him to be there.

And he says, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles. In other words, the thought is, it was while I was carrying out my mission for you Gentiles that I was captured, arrested, that I became a prisoner. And that's a beautiful thought for all of us who are Christians, that circumstances do not control us.

And a man's body might be in a prison, but four walls can't bind a Christian. It's a very nice thing to remember that our peace is in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. And nothing can affect the joy of the Christian, because our joy is there at the right hand of God.

So come what may on the earth, we can triumph above it all. For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. Now that word Gentile brings something to his mind.

It brings to his mind the whole subject of the revelation that had been committed to him by God. And so he says in verse two, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you. Now the if, once again, does not express any doubt.

It means since, since ye have heard. He wasn't doubting that they had heard, but he knew they had heard, and he's going on to explain it. Since ye have heard of the dispensation.

Now this word dispensation can also be translated fellowship. If you'll turn over to verse nine it says, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. Now the word fellowship there in the original language of the New Testament is exactly the same as the word dispensation in verse two.

Don't ask me why they translated it by different words. I don't know. Another meaning of the word is steward.

And what Paul is saying is this. God gave me a stewardship. A steward is one who takes care of the affairs of another.

If I had a thousand acre farm and hired a man to take care of it, he would be my steward. And the way he took care of it would be the stewardship. Now God gave a stewardship to Paul, a dispensation, something for him to take care of.

And the way he took care of it was called the stewardship. Now what was it? Well he speaks of it as the dispensation of the grace of God. In other words, during this time that Paul was preaching and the age in which we live, God's dealings with his people are characterized not by law, as they were in the Old Testament, but by grace.

This does not mean that God was not gracious in the Old Testament. He was, but he was testing them under conditions of law. Today his grace is going out warm, full and free to mankind.

So Paul says, since ye have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God, which is given me to you. This work was given to Paul to perform for the Gentiles. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, as Peter was the apostle to the Jews.

It didn't mean Paul never preached to Jews, but it meant primarily the people to whom he was sent were Gentiles. Alright, now we have first of all, it's revelation. The revelation of the mystery, and we'll put that number one, verses two to four.

A parenthesis on the mystery, it's revelation. Verses two to four. He says, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery.

Paul wants to emphasize at the very outset that the truth, the message that he preached, was not something he studied in books, not something he learned from the other twelve apostles, but it was something that was divinely revealed to him. Now frankly, I find this a very difficult portion of scripture to read, and I suppose most of the folks here do too. Perhaps it will help as we go along just to define these words.

Now this word mystery, if you have not already marked it down, perhaps you'd like to note down that the word mystery in the New Testament means a truth not hitherto revealed, but now revealed to believers. A truth hitherto not revealed, but now revealed to believers. And you have that in verse five, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

So he says in verse three, how that by revelation he, Christ or God, made known unto me the mystery. That is the truth not hitherto revealed, but now revealed, as I wrote afore in few words. When was that? What is he referring to in those words, as I wrote afore in few words? Well, he's referring to this same letter where this truth has been referred to, although not fully expounded.

For instance, in verses twenty-two and twenty-three of chapter one, the truth of the mystery is referred to. It says, And God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Then in chapter two, verses fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, are all allusions to this truth of the mystery.

So when he says, as I wrote afore in few words, he's referring to this same epistle which we have been studying. Verse four, whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. In other words, when you read these previous portions that I've spoken about, you'll understand how that by divine revelation, God has made it known to me.

Now we want to notice next what the mystery is. What is it, this mystery? And so we'll put down here to its definition. Definition.

Verses five and six. Now we've already had a general definition of the word mystery, and you have that in verse five, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. And here again we want to emphasize that apostles and prophets are New Testament apostles and prophets, not Old Testament prophets at all, but those raised up of God in the New Testament did sensation.

Now verse six tells us what the mystery is, and you might like to write it down just this way. Jew and Gentile made one body with Christ as head. That's the truth of the church, isn't it? Jew and Gentile made one body with Christ as the head.

And that's what you have in verse six, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. Now a lot of folks claim that the truth of the church is revealed in the Old Testament, that the church as we have it today in the New Testament is just a continuation of Israel in the Old Testament. But dear friends, you'll search in vain from Genesis to Malachi for any intimation of Jew and Gentile ever being formed into one new man with the glorified Christ as the head.

Jew and Gentile is body and Christ the head in heaven. It just is not found in the Old Testament, and that's why Paul speaks about this truth as a mystery, a truth not hitherto revealed. The church is something new in God's healing.

It was future when the Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. It wasn't something that was in existence in the Old Testament, and the calling of the church is heavenly, and its destiny is heavenly. So there you have the definition of the mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, that is, that they will inherit with believing Jews and of the same body.

Well, you certainly didn't have that in the Old Testament. They never were. And partakers of his promise.

Now I take it that when you have that expression, his promise in Christ by the gospel, the word promise usually in the New Testament, when spoken of in connection with the gospel, refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit. And this verse teaches that the Gentiles are partakers of the Holy Spirit, along with the Jews who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the next three verses, Paul describes the messenger, that is, himself.

And so we'll put as number three, his messenger, he speaks of himself now in some detail, verses 7-9. He says in verse 7, "...whereof I was made a minister." And the word minister in the New Testament doesn't carry any thought of officialism with it. It really means servant.

That's all it means. Men love to glorify words and glorify offices. But you know, the whole thought of ministry in the New Testament is lowly service.

Lowly service. It isn't aspiring for greatness or a place among the people of God, but it's just getting down and washing their feet, as it were. "...whereof I was made a minister, a servant, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." Paul says, this isn't a work that I deserved.

It was a gift of grace. The fact that God gave it to me wasn't because I was any better or more illustrious than anybody else. It was a sheer gift of grace.

And I don't carry it on by my own strength, either. I carry it on by the power of God himself. "...according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints." Now don't you kind of wish sometimes that Paul would move over and let you sit down beside him on this bench? But he won't. He says, I'm less than the least of all saints. So why does he say that? Well, I think Paul could never forget that he persecuted the Church of God.

He persecuted the Church of Christ. And even on the day of his conversion, he was on the road to Damascus to put to death those who believed in that precious name. And he said, that's the one it's to such an one that this grace is given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

Now notice that in verses 8 and 9, Paul has a twofold ministry. You ask most people today, what's your ministry? Oh, my ministry is to preach the gospel. Well, thank God Paul had that ministry too, but he didn't stop there.

No. Two things. Verse 1, verse 8, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

But then the second part of his commission was to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God. Let me express it this way. Paul wasn't satisfied just to preach the gospel, to get men and women saved, and then leave them there, saved in Christ.

Oh no. God gave him a commission to lead them on in the precious truths of the church. And that's a good pattern for the Lord's servants to follow today.

Not just to see babies born into the world and leave them as such. Oh no. But to teach them the precious truths of the faith.

God has ordained that the Christian faith should be propagated through the church. It's not our choice. It's not man's choice.

It's God's choice. And so Paul was not only concerned with seeing soul saved, but he was concerned with seeing New Testament churches planted, New Testament churches founded, where the saints of God could come together for worship and prayer and study of the word of God, and from which they could go out to all the world with a precious message of the redeeming love of Christ. So his first commission was to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Now isn't that a lovely expression? The unsearchable riches. Unexplorable, untrackable riches of Christ. And then to make all men see, and I take it that men here mean believers, because they're the only ones who could see, what is the dispensation or stewardship of the ministry, of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

Now here's another statement to the effect that the church is something new. God knew about it from all eternity, but man didn't. It was hidden in God.

And now Paul says, I've been given the glorious commission of making it known to men. Now Paul wasn't the only one who had this revelation, but he was certainly the primary one. The other apostles were given it too.

You remember Peter had the vision of the sheet let down from heaven and heard the voice of God saying what God has cleansed, call not thou common. In other words, the Gentiles were going to hear the gospel and be saved and be brought into the body of Christ just as well as the Jews. And that was the lesson Peter had to learn.

And so other apostles had this revelation made known to them, but it wasn't a primary sense given to Paul to make known to the Gentiles. And then you have the purpose of the revelation, the purpose of the mystery in verses 10 and 11. Why does God bother with the church? Let me put it just very bluntly.

Why didn't he just save men, period, and let them go about their way? Verse 10, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. And what does that teach us? Well it teaches us this, that tonight the angelic hosts of heaven are looking down, shall I say, from the ramparts of heaven on this earth. And they see something on this earth that was never seen before Pentecost, that's the church.

And as they see the church and observe what's going on, it is an object lesson to them of the manifold wisdom of God. Now that's quite a thought. How does the church witness to the wisdom of God? Did you ever think of that? Well, I suggest one way is this.

God in the church reaches down, saves ungodly sinners, and the next thing you know they're worshipping him with full heart and going out and seeking to win others to himself. And no doubt the angels just shake their heads in marvel and admiration. And then I think of how God in the church brings men of various nationalities and men of various temperaments together, and you'd think they'd just be doing like this all the time.

And instead of that, by doing that, God is working out graces in their lives that he could never work out otherwise. And the angels look on and they see in the church the manifold wisdom of God. And then they see God leading this company of people through this world, through an atmosphere that's foreign to them, and everything is very much against them.

And God cares for them, he provides for them, he hears their prayers, and leads them on, separate and holy people that they are. And the angels gasp in amazement. And then the angels look down and they see the sick and suffering saints of God.

And they see them going through the fires of affliction, and yet they see their faith in Jesus Christ unwavering. And the angels see in the church the manifold wisdom of God. Now supposing you were forming the church, what kind of a church would you form? Well, wouldn't you like everybody in it just to be like yourself? I suppose we would.

We'd like everybody to have a sweet disposition just like ourselves. That would make the ideal church. But that isn't wisdom.

You see, God does the very opposite. God takes no account of people like ourselves. And he saves them, redeems them, and then grace teaches them.

And pretty soon they're becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. But I think that's what this verse teaches, to the intent that now, this isn't something that's going to happen in eternity, now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. Now, isn't it too bad that conditions have taken the turn they have in the world? The church today, you look about you in every hand, and there's division.

Division and strife among the people of God. And this, which should have been an object lesson to angels, causes oftentimes, I'm afraid, reproach on the blessed name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that during this day God is calling his people, apart from all that denies his name, to a place of simple gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be of pure as testimony to himself, both to men and to angels.

Verse 11, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Paul says this isn't something that God just thought up when Matthew's gospel was written, but this is something which he purposed eternally. Even before the world was framed, God had the church in his heart, and now he has brought it to pass.

And in Christ we have boldness and approach to God with confidence through faith in him. Wherefore, Paul says, I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Perhaps the people to whom he was writing might have thought it was a disgrace that their apostle should be languishing in a Roman prison.

People would say, Defeat and failure, and the Ephesians might be ashamed. Paul says, Don't be ashamed, be proud. Be proud that I am where I am, which is your glory.

I am here for the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Now the break comes in the chapter, and he resumes in verse 14 what he started to say in verse 1. But again I say, it's beautiful, it shows the inspiration of the scriptures, it shows the divine hand that wrote this book, that the great truth of the church, which is a parenthesis in God's dealing, should be presented in the word of God as a parenthesis too. And so now we come to a prayer of Paul, and it's a prayer for power.

We'll call this F, prayer for power, verses chapter 3, verses 14 through 19. Now he says, For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, or of whom every family in heaven and earth is named. Now perhaps this refers to the angelic family in heaven, perhaps it refers to the family of the redeemed in heaven and the family of the redeemed on earth, but the thought seems to be that God is the Father, and the whole idea of fatherhood originated with God, and every other family that exists takes its name from him.

Now Paul prays in this portion for three things. He prays, first of all, that they might comprehend a fourfold dimension. So I'll just put here, prayer for power, one, prayer for power, two, to comprehend the dimension.

You'll probably want to write that, to comprehend the dimension, verses 16 through 18. He says 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, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all faith what is the breadth and length and depth and height. Now the things that Paul is praying for are things that you cannot understand in mere human knowledge.

They are things that can only be understood by the power of the Spirit of God. And so he prays, first of all, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. Now the real meaning of this passage, I think, is that Christ may be at home in your hearts, because Christ dwells in the heart of everyone who is a true believer in the Lord Jesus.

He dwells there, but is he at home there? Well, that depends on our daily living, doesn't it? That depends on whether we go through the day neglectful of him or not, or whether we go through the day practicing his conscious presence with us. Wouldn't it be a nice thing if we could begin the day with a request to the Lord that each moment during the day we might be conscious of his indwelling, of his presence with us, and everything would be done with an eye to that? That Christ may be at home in your hearts. How can that be? By faith.

By faith. Faith means dependence, does it not? That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height. Now, you have these four dimensions.

It has often been pointed out that it does not say the breadth of love, the length of love, or the depth of love, or the height of love. Now, what are these dimensions? What are the dimensions that Paul is referring to in this epistle? Well, one of the first rules of Bible interpretation is to seek the answer right in the context. And I'd like to ask you tonight, what is the great breadth that is considered in Paul's letter to the Ephesians? I wonder if somebody would suggest an answer to that.

What is the greatest breadth that you have in this letter? Anybody? What is the greatest distance that has been spanned? The greatest breadth. It's right in this very same letter. Well, I would suggest that the breadth is found back in verse 14.

The arms of God reaching out in love and embracing Jew and Gentile. I suggested last night that the difference between Jew and Gentile was the greatest distance in the moral universe of God. God created that distinction.

And in the cross he has bridged that gulf, and the breadth is indicated by bringing Jew and Gentile together in one man in Christ. I merely suggest that. Now it says the breadth and the length.

All right, now what is the greatest length that you find in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians? What's the longest distance in this letter? Well, let me suggest this. Back in the first chapter, here's the beginning of the length. It says, verse 4 of chapter 1, according as he has chosen of him before the foundation of the world.

Now that's the beginning of it. And then the ending of it is in verse 7 of chapter 2, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. In other words, the length reaches back into the past eternity, according as he has chosen of him before the foundation of the world, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness.

All right, then it says the depth. What's the deepest depth that you reach in the epistle to the Ephesians? Well, that's in chapter 2, isn't it? You are to be quick unto a dead in trespasses and sins, verses 2 and 3, for in time past ye walked according to the course of this world. That's as deep as you go, and we spoke of that last night in the depth valley.

And then the height. What's the highest height in the epistle to the Ephesians? Well, it's seated with Christ in the heavenly. Verse 6 of chapter 2, raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Now, I just suggest that as being the meaning, but the interesting thing is when you put those all together, what do you get? You get breadth and length, and you get height of depth that forms a cross, and that's exactly what the cross has done. That's exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. Beginning back in an eternity past and reaching on to an eternity future, he embraces all mankind, Jew and Gentile, who put their faith in him.

He raises them up from the muck of the mire of sin and degradation, and seeks them with himself in the heavenly. And Paul says, now I'd like to, I'm just praying to God that he'll grant you to enter into the riches of all this. All that's comprehended in the cross, all that the cross means to God, means to Christ, and means to you.

May be able to comprehend with all things what is the breadth and length and depth and height, verse 19, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. And so that's number two here, to comprehend the dimensions, two, to know the love of Christ, that's verse 19, says that to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now, how can you know something that passeth knowledge? Well, I think the thought here is that it passeth human knowledge, don't you? It's something that surpasses human knowledge, but God reveals to us by the Spirit of God, the love of Christ.

A love that loved us in spite of what we were. When he loved us, he knew how bad we were. He wasn't looking for anything in return.

He knew all the sins that we'd ever commit. He knew how we'd grieve him and break his heart, and he loved us just the same. He saw me ruined by the fall, yet loved me notwithstanding all.

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. And so we'll put that in the third one, that ye might be filled with the fullness of God, verse 19. Now, this thought is so absolutely amazing that it's difficult to know what to say about it.

To think that one who was a wretched sinner, and on the way to hell, might ever be brought to the place where the apostle Paul can pray for him, that he might be filled with all the fullness of God. How would you ever give an explanation of a verse like that? Well, all I can do is just give the familiar illustration. The little boy goes down with his tin tail to the seashore, and he fills his tail with the water.

And his tail is filled, but the sea isn't exhausted. And that's about all we can do, too, isn't it? That we might come to the Lord, and that our empty vessels might be filled with himself. Not of self to cloud the glory, not of earth the light to dim, emptied to be filled with him.

Telling forth the wondrous story, emptied to be filled with him. And of course, that's just the point that God has put us here, to be his representatives, to tell forth his glory in the earth. That's why God made man in the image and likeness of himself.

That word image means representative. And God's purpose in the church is that those of us who are saved might be little miniatures of himself down here, little replicas of himself. How well have you and I represented the Lord Jesus Christ today, those of us who are Christians? That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

And then in the last two verses you have what we'll just call G. Praise to God. Praise to God. Verses 20 and 21.

It says, Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in him. Paul says, Though I have made some great requests for you in prayer, I bowed my knee and requested these things, but I know God is able to do not only what I request, but above all that we can ask, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

And this verse continues the thought that the purpose of the church here on earth is to bring glory to God. Glory to God in the holy lives of its members. Glory to God in the worship that arises from the church to him.

Glory to God in the service that results from lives of dedication and devotion to himself. And so Paul prays, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

So shall we just close with a word of prayer and praise to the Lord.

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