

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 3:14-21

“*For this reason...*” you’ll notice that this phrase starts chapter 3, and now we see it again to start this section. You’ll recall that 3:2-13 is sort of a digression of thought, of which now Paul comes back to his original train of thought. Of course, when we see a phrase like, “*For this reason...*”, the logical question to ask, or at least have clarified in our mind is, “what reason?” The answer, the reason, is basically everything Paul had laid out in chapter 2. Having contrasted life without Christ with life in Christ, and having laid out the result, especially as it pertains to the new humanity God is creating in Christ, Paul cannot help but enter into worshipful prayer as we see in this particular section.

Speaking of worshipful prayer, one way to conceive of Ephesians 1-3 is as an extended doxology. (“Doxology” literally means the study of glory, and is usually used/understood as a liturgical formula of praise. Which, again, is a good way of thinking of the first three chapters of Ephesians.) When Paul considers all that God has done, all that He has blessed us with, in Christ, he becomes (rightly so) overcome/overwhelmed with a desire to voice worship.

Q. Describe a time when you have been overwhelmed/overcome by God. How did you respond?

A key metaphor Paul has been using throughout this letter is that of family...which is one of the key metaphors of the church throughout the New Testament. Obviously calling God “Father” has major family connotations, and the main reason the metaphor is used. Remember back in 1:5 Paul says that we are “*adopted*”; in 1:14 Paul talks about our “*inheritance*” (while not an absolute, inheritance is typically passed down through family lines); in 2:19 Paul says that we are “*members of God’s household*”; in 3:6 Paul uses the term “*heirs*” (again, not an absolute, but typically a term used in family lines). All these terms and phrases have the family image in common and in mind. Now in our present passage Paul says, “*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole **family** in heaven and on earth derives its name.*” (3:14 NIV)

Q. What has being part of your family of origin meant to you? (good and bad). How do you feel about the idea of being part of another family?

Q. Describe a time when you really felt like you belonged, when you felt really connected and cared for by a group of people.

What we do not want to miss—and it’s rather hard to miss—is all the “power” terms that are loaded into Paul’s short prayer. In 3:16 Paul prays that they will be “*strengthened with power*” (the word “power” there in Greek is “*dunamis*” from which we get words like dynamo and dynamite); in 3:18 Paul prays that they “*may have power*” (a different Greek word that means “eminently able; to have full strength”); and in 3:20 Paul mentions “*His power that is at work within us*” (back to “*dunamis*” again). Paul was stressing throughout this prayer that there is

power outside of ourselves that is available and accessible to us, that is for us, and is good. Paul wanted his readers to experience this power.

Notice how Paul connects the idea of power to love. In Paul's mind power and love are intimately connected. That's because God is the source of both. And ultimately Paul wanted his readers to know God, out of which would naturally flow knowing/experiencing God's love and power. Notice in 3:16 that Paul's prayer for power was "*through His Spirit*"; notice in 3:18 Paul's prayer for power was that his readers would be able to grasp "*the love of Christ*". So we see the Trinity represented in this passage, Father, Christ (Son), and Spirit.

3:20-21 can be considered the doxology within the doxology, or the doxology that concludes the doxology. God's glory in the church (that's us) and in Christ Jesus is according to His power that is at work within us. This is a key concept to grasp. The Christian life is one that is lived in partnership and cooperation with God. The Christian life is hard. In fact, we could say it's impossible...except that we've been empowered to accomplish what we're called to, the task we've been given. If we try to do it under our own power we will fail. Any success is due to God working in and through us...thus, He gets the glory. I like how Paul puts in Colossians 1:28-29, "*We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.*" This partnership, this working together, was the original intent for humans from the beginning. Humans working in cooperation with God to govern, manage, steward, His good creation. So, really, Paul wasn't so much describing something new, but pointing back to the original plan which has never been lost (even though it seemed like it), and that God is working to get back to...and His plans will not be thwarted.

- Q. Describe a time when you felt paralyzed and powerless to do anything, to make any positive change or impact in a situation.**
- Q. Describe a time when you felt/experienced a power outside/beyond yourself empowering you to accomplish something, to understand something, to get you through something, etc.**
- Q. How often do you put yourself in a position where you need God to come through for you, where your power will not be enough, versus playing it safe...not really attempting anything beyond what you're confident you can handle on your own?**

Just a couple more ideas/concepts to highlight before we wrap up this first half of Ephesians (And please remember, we want to keep the depth and richness of the first three chapters of Ephesians in mind as we prepare to dive into the second half of this letter.) A favorite word of Paul's seems to be "*fullness*". We see it in 1:23, here in 3:19, "*that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*", and we'll see it again in chapter 4. If we think of ourselves as a cup, what are we filled with? Paul's desire for his readers was that they/we would be filled to the brim, to the max we can hold, with God. There is no greater honor for us than to be filled with God. And God desires to fill us. This brings us to another word picture for us to grasp, that

is the word “ *dwell* ”. Both individually and communally we are where God chooses to dwell. Back in 2:22 Paul writes, “ *And in Him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by His Spirit.* ” And here in 3:17 he writes, “ *so that Christ may **dwell** in your hearts through faith.* ” Images of “fullness” and “dwelling” reinforce the idea that Christianity is not about religion but about relationship. God’s very Being intermeshing with ours.

Notice Paul’s almost poetic way of speaking about the supremacy of love. After praying that his readers would grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, he prays that they/we would “ *know this love that surpasses knowledge* ” (3:19 NIV) Knowledge is good, but love is better—love exceeds knowledge, love goes further than knowledge, love is greater than knowledge.

- Q. Be really honest now...if you could choose to have 10x the amount of knowledge you currently have or 10x the ability to love others than you currently do, which would you choose? (We all know the “right” answer, but what is the honest answer? And—reality check—one will be far more painful than the other.)**

- Q. Who do you know that is clearly filled with God? How did they get that way?**

- Q. When people think of Christians and/or the Church, do they think, “Oh, that’s where God dwells?” Explain.**