

How Do We Bridge The Gap Between *Who We Are* and *How We Are To Live*?
Ephesians 3:14-21

September 18, 2005

Don't you love that song? When you listen to it—what stands out? What is it about the words that just grab your heart? Isn't there a sense of awe and amazement that a God who is infinite and completely above His Creation would have such a concern for it—especially for fallen, rebellious sinners who are powerless to change their desperate situation? As I listened to this song, I could not help but think about the book of Ephesians because they *both* express a similar sense of awe and wonder in what God has done for unworthy sinners like us.

But do you want to know what is *really* amazing? It's not *so much* what God has done for us—as amazing as that is—but just *how little we* are *amazed* by *what* He has done for us! And that ought to trouble us. Because if we are not captured by that awe—or if we lose this sense of awe, we deprive ourselves of the very motivation we need to live out the Christian life. And that thought is really scary as we approach the second half of Ephesians. You see—if you aren't already being moved by the awe of Ephesians 1-3, you will likely ignore or, worse yet, harden yourself to the commands of Ephesians 4-6. Let me explain that in a little more detail. The epistle or letter of Ephesians is divided into two main sections: Chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. The first three chapters deal with our *position*. The second three with our *practice*. The first three are designed to produce *awe*—and this awe is what leads to the intended response in the last three chapters which is obedient *action*. Can you see the problem? Let me repeat what I said just a moment ago. If your heart is not captured by the *awe* of the first three chapters, you will lack the necessary power to live out the *actions* commanded in the last three chapters.

I dare say many of us here tonight have heard sermons on communication from Ephesians 4:25-32. And who here has not heard sermons and attended seminars on marriage and family from chapters 5-6? When I talk to people about problems with their spouses or with their parents or children, it is not often the case that all I need to do is to explain the way they are supposed to behave. A person may need some help on *how* to carry out a particular command like submitting to their husband or *how* to show respect to their parents in a difficult situation or how to identify habits that needlessly provoke their children. But rarely do I need to say something like this: “Steve, God wants you to love your wife as Christ loved the Church!” And then Steve suddenly raises both hands with astonished excitement and exclaims: “***That's it! That is what I have been missing. If only I had known that before! But now that I do—my marriage will never be the same. Oh, thank you pastor Jerry. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! I know this insight is going to absolutely revolutionize my marriage!***”

Do you understand what I am trying to say? *So what is the problem?* The problem is either one of ignorance of our great blessings in Christ or just plain spiritual blindness. Either we don't know what Ephesians 1-3 is saying, that is we are essentially ignorant of its contents—or we intellectually have understood it but we are *spiritually* blind to its implications. One problem is as bad as the other.

But regardless of which problem we have—none of us can afford to get to the end of chapter three and then move into chapter four without the same sense of the *awe* that Paul had when he wrote this book. So here is what we are going to do tonight. Two things. And both are aimed at the two problems I have just mentioned.

First, we are going to do a very brief review of the first three chapters—if nothing else but to get a bird’s eye view and with it the perspective that can produce the awe we desperately need as we go into the last three chapters. But more than likely—that alone won’t be enough for you. And so the second thing we are going to do is to learn how to pray for spiritual power and hopefully *practice this week* what Paul is teaching us to do in Ephesians 3:14-21.

Chapters 1-3 show us God’s amazing plan of redemption. In chapter one, we saw that this plan was no desperate, knee-jerk reaction on the part of the God-head. Unlike the accusations that are being hurled at local, state, and federal governments for their inadequate response to the mayhem caused by Hurricane Katrina—God was *not* caught by surprise and therefore He was *not* unprepared for the greatest disaster of all-time—namely man’s sin. Rather Paul reminds us beginning in verse 3 that God the Father chose us out of the mayhem caused by our sin *before the world was even created!* But He didn’t choose us to merely escape the coming judgment like the rescuers who swooped down in helicopters and air lifted people to higher and drier ground. He actually had *planned* all along to *adopt* us into His family through His Son, our elder brother—Jesus Christ!

But adoptions as some of you know don’t come cheaply. Verse 7 reminds us that there was a great price that had to be paid—an infinite price. “*In him (referring to Jesus) we have redemption through His blood.*” This sacrifice was so infinite, so comprehensively sufficient that when a person accepts it by faith—there is *no* sin that it cannot forgive, *no* stain that it cannot cover, *no* skeleton in the closet that it cannot remove, *no* remorse that it cannot transform into praise and thanksgiving! This adoption doesn’t just get our name on the family registry of heaven, it provides for us all the privileges of membership in God’s family (**Illustration of Mephibosheth in David’s court**). But what are those privileges for us? There are many. But in verses 8-10, Paul focuses on the main one: *Access to divine wisdom and understanding*. In short—a glimpse of the real meaning and purpose of life which involves being part of God’s incredible restoration of His creation as He brings *all* of human history to a climax in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ!

But we are not mere observers of this great restoration—we are actually a *key part of it*. So again in verses 11-14, Paul connects our being chosen to this glorious restoration project and reminds us that God has given us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee or down payment that He will make good on His promise to make us His cherished inheritance. And what is all this for? Three times Paul echoes the key refrain of this great hymn of praise in verse 3-14: ***To the praise of His glory!*** God’s wonderful plan is all about revealing the kind of God He is as He transforms human tragedy into incredible blessing that will never end.

But what makes this all the more amazing is when you realize what God is working with here. What kind of people is God doing this for? Is it kind and gentle people, patiently if not helplessly sitting on their roof-tops waiting for God's helicopter of grace to airlift us out of the rising, putrefying waters of sin? No! If you look at chapter two, we aren't just a bunch of passive victims waiting to be rescued. We are violent perpetrators against God's rule and reign. God did not have to merely rescue us from mayhem. We *were* the mayhem. We were more like the looters, rapists, and murderers roaming the city of New Orleans. Do you think I am exaggerating? Then listen to Paul in his own words in Ephesians 2:3

*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by **nature objects of wrath.***

One of the reasons we don't experience this sense of amazement is that we fail to come to grips with this awful reality of our sinful condition. But when we do, verses 4-10 become truly precious to us. In these verses, Paul reminds us of God's great love, His rich mercy, and the incomparable riches of His grace that takes unworthy sinners like us and causes us to sit with Him in the heavenly realms. You may recall that this *sitting with Christ* is a description of rule and power. Ephesians 1:20-22 uses this terminology to describe the risen and ascended Christ who is now enthroned in heaven and ruling over the universe. By the way, when it talks in verse 22 about all things being under Christ's feet, that is an ancient way of describing a ruler's authority and dominion over a defeated enemy. So do not miss the point I am about to make: Ephesians 2:6 is pointing out that God's redemptive work so transforms sinners that they no longer live in their *own sin-marred, self-centered image* but instead they once again begin to reflect God's image as they progressively rule and reign over sin in their own lives—and will one day rule and reign with Christ over the new heaven and earth. If I could compare this grace to what happened in New Orleans, it would be like President Bush rescuing the looters—not only from their dire circumstances, but ultimately from their own self-destructiveness. But there is more! Following the analogy of this text, he would not only remove them from their immediately dreadful situation, he would somehow transform them into model citizens and bring them back to the Whitehouse where they would live with him and serve as cabinet members in his administration!!

This grace not only reconciles us to God—it also reconciles us to each other. Ephesians 2:11-22 reminded us how that through Christ's cross work, God has taken human relationships that were totally at odds with each other because of sin's power and has reconciled them. In the first century, that involved accomplishing the unthinkable—Jews and Gentiles, people who were separated in so many ways—they wore different clothes, prayed different prayers and ate different food—yet whom God reconciled into one new and unified people. *Today* that likewise involves the unthinkable. It involves marriages hopelessly gridlocked by competing sinful desires and people divided by sinful thinking about race, culture, and economics—becoming one new body in Christ. Paul figuratively describes this relationship not only as a body but as a building—a Temple. Just let your mind put its arms around that thought for a moment. Think of man's prideful rebellion in attempting to build the Tower of Babel.

And how did God respond to their self-centered worship? He scattered them linguistically, culturally, and geographically. And ever since that time we have been divided and suffering from a lot of mutual suspicion. But Christ has come and he is currently taking the ruins of a godless building project dedicated to the glory of man—and from it He is constructing a new Temple made of *human* stones to be a dwelling place for the Living God! Think of it. For several millennia, man has been trying to put the human race back together. Whether it is the US trying to put a war torn country back together in the Middle East or a flood devastated community on the Gulf Coast—or Dr. Phil or Dr. Laura trying to put a failed marriage or family back together—in the end it all seems *so futile*. Has the world ever been more divided than it is today? And God’s answer for this problem is the Gospel. And His instrument for renovating a sin-torn world is His church! This plot is so unlikely and yet such a compelling witness of His wisdom and power that God has made it His object lesson for angels. And do you know something? If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are part of this incredible lesson! Talk about something worth living for!

Question: How often does this reality intersect your experience? How much does this incredible privilege that God has extended to you really grip your soul? How can we possibly look at a book like Ephesians and then just go out for pizza and struggle to talk about much beyond the Lions or the ridiculously high cost of gasoline?

You can see why Paul pauses at the end of chapter three before he goes on to talk about the practice of doing life together. So what does he do next? He does what he has been doing throughout the first three chapters. He prays. And in praying about these powerful truths, he shows us how to pray. So let’s eavesdrop on his prayer and try to follow his example in Ephesians 3:14-21:

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.** And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 **may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,** 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 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, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

If we would be so captivated by the awe of what God has done for us that we would have the grace to do life together as believers before a watching world, we need to pray as Paul models for us in this prayer. There are two things that you and I need to pray for:

- I. Pray for God to strengthen our inner being (16-17a)

*16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***

Praying for power is not all that novel of a thing. We do it frequently. We pray for power to remember what we have studied so we can pass an exam. Or power to do our best in a particular sport or power to do well in our jobs—and so forth. But the request for power here is very pointed and specific. It is for power *in our inner being or inner man*.

Have you ever considered how much of our praying is nearly the opposite of what Paul requests here? Most church prayer sheets look like a catalog of diseases. And while there is absolutely nothing wrong with praying for bodily illnesses, we often miss the point of what God is doing and what we should be praying for. If prayer is simply reminding God that somebody's body is malfunctioning, that really seems pretty inefficient. Why doesn't God just put that particular request on auto-pilot so we can pray about other stuff. I mean isn't God powerful enough that he could simply make what would be for Him a few adjustments and reduce the toll that the curse of sin has put on us and the rest of the world? Or could it be that our outer man problems are in fact an opportunity for even more than physical healing—as wonderful as that is?

To really grasp what Paul is getting at, you need to look at his own testimony in II Corinthians 4:16-18:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Paul's body like ours was wearing down due to age. But in addition to the normal aging process, Paul faced some other extraordinary pressures as a leader in the church. These situations took a heavy toll on Paul. He alludes to some obvious physical suffering in verses 8-10 (such as being beaten and stoned)—but also some deep emotional distresses—such as when his motives were maligned or his apostolic authority was called into question or undermined by false teachers.

Any modern stress scale would have put Paul in the category of extremely high risk for a heart attack or a nervous breakdown. But notice what he talks about in verse 16. ***Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*** Even while his outer man was taking an awful beating—his inner man was actually getting stronger!

I dare say that there is no one in this room tonight whose suffering comes close to what Paul is describing here. Yet as you move past your thirties into the forties, and fifties and beyond—you begin to watch your outer man wearing down. Every time you take a shower, you watch a few more hairs disappear down the drain—never to be seen again. You begin to feel the sharp pain of arthritis in an increasing number of joints. Your golf swing is a little

slower. And you find yourself squinting to read road signs and the newspaper. And if you wait long enough—your whole body will finally shut down for good. Yet Paul talks about experiencing something in 2 Corinthians 4 that he prays we all will experience here in Ephesians 3:16-17.

Why is that so important? Because we live in a world that focuses almost exclusively on the outer man. And while that is important to God—so important that one day He will resurrect it and give us a new and glorified body—the inner man is the present focus of God’s strength and our great need.

I have heard Bob say more than once that we need to be focusing on our inner man now because the day may come where its neglect will become embarrassingly obvious. We have all been around people who have grown old gracefully because they have inner resources upon which to draw even as they physically wear down. But you undoubtedly know others who under similar circumstances manifest a bitter, caustic spirit and who become increasingly difficult and demanding. And what you often see happening is that their outer man no longer has the capacity to hide their impatience and ill-temper. With no physical reserves to support them—what has been in their hearts all along begins to conspicuously manifest itself.

The point of Paul’s prayer here is that *we all* need God’s power—and we need it specifically in the part of our being that controls our character and prepares us for our ultimate home in heaven. When you consider the great plan that Paul unfolds in chapters 1-3 and the tremendous responsibility we have in chapters 4-6 to live for God in the midst of a sin-cursed world—you begin to understand exactly why Paul is on his knees. There is *no way* you or I can pull this off in our own strength. But neither can we dismiss it as impossible and therefore irrelevant in today’s world!

And as if that is not already enough to fuel our prayer life, look at what Paul adds in verse 17a: “*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith....*” What is Paul talking about? Doesn’t Christ already dwell in our hearts? Doesn’t His Spirit abide in us the moment we come to saving faith? The first time I read this text, I had to ask that question. The key to the meaning here is found in the meaning of the word “dwell.” It is a special word that doesn’t mean to simply “inhabit” like a homeless person seeking some sort of temporary refuge. It means to “settle down or into.” In our way of speaking, it might even carry the idea of “feeling at home.” D.A. Carson uses this analogy:

“Picture a couple carefully marshaling enough resources to put together a down payment. They buy their house, recognizing full well that it needs a fair bit of work. They can’t stand the black and silver wallpaper in the master bedroom. There are mounds of trash in the basement. The kitchen was designed for the convenience of the plumber, not the cook. The roof leaks in a

couple of places, and the insulation barely meets minimum standards. The electrical box is too small, the lighting in the bathroom is poor, the heat exchanger in the furnace is corroded. But still, it is this young couple's first home—and they are grateful.

The months slip past, then the years. The black and silver wallpaper has been replaced with tasteful[ly up-to-date] patterns. They couple has remodeled their kitchen, doing much of the work themselves. The roof no longer leaks, and the furnace has been replaced with a more powerful unit that also includes a central air conditioner. Better yet, as the family grows, this couple completes a couple of rooms in the basement and adds a small wing to serve as a study and sewing room. The grounds are neatly trimmed and boast a dazzling rock garden. Twenty-five years later after the purchase, the husband remarks one day to his wife, "You know, I really like it here. This place suits us. Everywhere we look we see the results of our own labor. The house has been shaped to our needs and taste—and I really feel comfortable." (A Call To Spiritual Reformation).

Isn't that a great analogy of what Christ is doing in your life? And you get a further picture of that when Paul describes the process in Ephesians 4:22-24 where he talks about renovating our minds as we get rid of the old ways of thinking and desiring and put on God's new ways. I would encourage you all to take a look at the mission house on 12 Mile Road. It isn't much of a place to live right now. In fact, it is barely habitable—perhaps only in the third world. But watch the transformation process over the next few weeks. Better yet, talk to Terry O'Brien and see if you might be able to be part of that process. Whether you are watching it or actually involved in renovating it—keep in mind—that is exactly what God is up to in your life and the lives of the people in this body. And pray that we will more and more become the fitly framed building that accurately testifies to His wisdom and power. Because if you are not experiencing his renovating power, you will miss His joy and the opportunity to be a display of His glory before a watching universe!

You say if I know myself—and I am honest, there are days my life is so messed up, there are so many holes in my roof and so many live wires dangerously zapping people around me that I feel hopeless. Why FEMA wouldn't even consider fixing my life up! Then look back at verse 16:

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...

Jesus loves to take hopeless cases. He loves the toughest renovation projects. His only requirement for renovating you and settling down in your life is this: Faith. Not self-reformation. Not a little penance. But faith in a crucified, resurrected, and glorified Savior who has put all things—including your sin—under His feet! So the first thing we need to pray for is that God would strengthen our inner being.

I know we are almost out of time. I am going to come back next week and finish this up. But I at least want to give you the second part of Paul's prayer to think about and actually make your own prayer this week. It is found in the middle of verse 17 through verse 19:

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

The second request, like the first is a request for God's power. In this case, the power to comprehend Christ's love.

II. Pray for God to give you the power to comprehend Christ's love (17b-19)

This almost sounds too obvious—but believe me, its not! Paul isn't assuming his audience—then or now—knew nothing of Christ's love. What he is assuming is that we do not *adequately grasp* His love.

This knowledge is obviously more than an *intellectual* sort of understanding. It is not the sort of knowledge that you simply read about in a Systematic Theology or merely recite in a creed. It is a *personal* knowledge of it. A knowledge of experience. A knowledge that comes to us in a fresh way that overwhelms us—if not stuns us. It is so profound that it exceeds the ability of language to describe it. And when Paul tries to do so in spatial terminology—he quickly runs out of words.

Let me illustrate: Do you think you know our solar system? You might know that the sun is in the center and that there are nine or perhaps even ten planets that orbit the sun. You might even know those planets in order and if you are really into it—you might even know their relative sizes and distances from the sun. But that knowledge is different than the knowledge of an astronaut on the space shuttle who has a much better perspective than what we can know from a book or even through an average telescope.

One way we try to know things is by comparing the unfamiliar with the familiar. If you have traveled much on earth you have a practical feel for the size of the planet. And when you consider that the sun weighs a thousand times more than all of the planets combined—or that you if the sun could be hollowed out like a pumpkin, you could easily place a million place a million planets the size of the earth inside of it! Now that starts to blow your mind, doesn't it. Paul is trying to get us to think the same way about God's love! But if you go beyond our expansive solar system and simply try to reach the next closest star—Alpha Centauri—you would have to go 30 trillion miles. In other words, if you had a space ship that could go 30,000 miles per hour or nearly twice the speed of the Space Shuttle, Discovery at its highest speed—it would still take you a million years to get there!

But when you consider that there are 100 billion other stars in our galaxy—and that there are 100 billion other galaxies, each with 100 billion stars within them—our minds go numb. There is no way we can comprehend such a number. It is simply beyond our capacity. That is what Paul is trying to say about God’s love. And his prayer is not simply that we could somehow explain it. His burden is that it would so overwhelm us that we could not help but desire to simply be conduits of such overwhelming love reflecting back to God and overflowing to each other.

How do we experience such love? How do we move in the direction that Paul is praying for? The same way you “get geeked” about the immensity of outer space. It is always there. It has not moved or shrunk. Yet we just treat it like it’s not there or that it is hardly significant. Yet what happens when you think about it?

Listen to Psalm 8:3-4:

3 When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
4 what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

When David looks at and begins to ponder the immensity of the skies—He is overwhelmed by it. We need to do the same thing with God’s love. Our problem is that we have taken it and put it into a zip drive and shrunk it to something we think we can put into our back pocket. Oh yes, I know about God’s love. “For God so loved the world...” Or “God commended His love toward us...” But do we know it? Just try this: Keep a list of the times you sin in a day—not just in deed or word, but in thought or motive. If you are serious about this—you will probably fry your calculator! Just three times a day would equal some 80,000 + in a normal life time. And it only would take one to send you to hell! Yet, hundreds of thousands of times the Accuser will go before the Father and accuse you before His throne. For sins, past and present. And if you listen to your own heart, you will feel guilt and shame and despair. But if you go into the throne room of heaven via the portal of Romans there you will find a faithful advocate who never tires of pleading your case. Whose love never gets pushed to the limits because there are no limits. Consider his love. Know His love. Sing His love. And yes, don’t be afraid to *feel* His love.

And pray that God will more and more cause you to overflow with it in such a way that you can joyfully cooperate with His plan and joyfully do life together in His Church with His people for His glory! This week, *study* this prayer. *Pray* this prayer. *Live* this prayer!

