

EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY
EPHESIANS 3:13-21
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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This morning we're studying **EPHESIANS 3:13-21**. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter from *The New Testament* while he was a prisoner in Rome in about 62 A.D. I'm so thankful that we have God's Word available to us - and that God has called me to spend much of my life studying and teaching it. What a joy it is to get into it and invite it to get into us. Like the description King David uses for you and I in **PSALM 139:14**, the Word of God is also "fearfully and wonderfully made." Sixty-six books, written by about 40 different people, over 1,400 - 1,800 years ... the Bible itself is a miracle of God's intention and love for us.

I love how God's Word is bound together to bring us the complete message of God's desire to be restored to and in relationship and fellowship with you and me as His creation. We need to study and know *The Old Testament* to understand the roots, the back-story, and the soil out of which everything in *The New Testament* grows.

We need to know the *Gospels* in order to understand Jesus Christ, to know how His birth, His ministry, His teachings, His death, His resurrection, and His return to heaven brings to life all the other teachings found in *The Old and New Testaments*.

And we need to know what is taught in *The New Testament letters* in order to be grounded in the truths of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, and to know how to live out our faith in the day-to-day circumstances of life. So we need it **ALL** - from **GENESIS** to **REVELATION** ... and that's why I teach God's Word the way I do, verse-by-verse, so that together you and I can move into, and through, and around, all the terrain of God's Word, because it's all interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent.

And this truth brings us to our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

If you have a passion to know and be known by God's Word, it's a sign that you're maturity in your faith, and that your desire to take on more of the character of Jesus Christ and live into the will of God is more than just empty talk.

If your passion to know and be known by God's Word is non-existent or stagnant, you've stalled out in your faith and are spinning your wheels when it comes to the goal of taking on the character of Jesus Christ and living out the will of God.

So with that brief introduction, please take out your Bibles and open them up with me to **EPHESIANS 3**, and we'll look into the nine verses here in **EPHESIANS 3:13-21**.

EPHESIANS 3:13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹³ Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

In our study of **EPHESIANS 3:1-12** last Sunday, Paul called us to understand God's heart for uniting the Jews and Gentiles into one new family of people, called "Christians", who then would make a new kind of spiritual community called "the church". Paul was the person who planted this church, and was their first pastor-teacher ... he knew people there by name and loved them ... and he said to them ...

God has called me to weave together the Jews and the Gentiles into a new spiritual family. It's God's plan, not mine. So don't be bummed out or discouraged by what God has asked me to do. I know it seems like too big of a task, but trust me in this ... that if God asked me to do this (and I assure you that He has), then you can also be confident that God can and will give me the discernment, the courage, and the power I need to get the job done, **AS LONG AS I stay obedient to Him ... listening to Him and depending on Him every step of the way.**"

And this truth brings us to our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

When God calls us to do something with Him and for Him, God will provide whatever it takes to get the job done - but it will usually also involve hard work, commitment, and sacrifice on our part.

We heard Paul tell us in **EPHESIANS 3:1-12** that he was the one who blazed the trail and brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. And it's because of this kind of "spiritually pioneering fatherhood" that Paul feels for the Gentiles that he also feels compelled to responsible to pray this prayer in **EPHESIANS 3:13-21** for their spiritual maturity and development. And as we read and study this prayer, it's important for us to remember that all people are made up of three separate and unique parts, just as the Trinity of God is made up of three parts ... **God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit.** And the three parts that make up who we are as human beings are our **SPIRITS**, our **SOULS**, and our **BODIES**. **WE ARE A SPIRIT, WE HAVE A SOUL, and WE LIVE IN A BODY.**

FIRST, we are a SPIRIT. Our **SPIRIT** is where God's Holy Spirit takes up residence inside of us when we make the decision to come into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

Our **SPIRIT** is the eternal part of us that will never die. When we come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ we are, in that instant, **JUSTIFIED, or MADE RIGHT** with God.

SECOND, we have a SOUL. Our **SOUL** is our *personality* ... it's the part of us people see, know, and connect with. Our **SOUL** is made up of

three parts, our **MIND** (how we **THINK**), our **WILL** (how we **DECIDE**), and our **EMOTION** (how we **FEEL**).

When we come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our **SOUL** begins the transformation process that in the Bible is called **SANCTIFICATION**, as we become more and more like Jesus Christ day-by-day, and choice-by-choice.

THIRD, we live in a **BODY** ... Our **BODY** is what we live in as human beings. It's the tangible, vulnerable, physical part of who we are. Someday, either at our death and the beginning of our eternal life with God in heaven, or at the time of Jesus Christ's return, our **BODIES** will also be directly impacted by our choice to be in a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ ... because in eternity God will give us new, perfect bodies. God's **WORD** calls this **GLORIFICATION**.

If you haven't yet made the decision to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, then I've got some good news for you. Because today ... on Sunday morning, the 11th of July 2010, you're going to have the opportunity to come into a relationship with Him ... to have God's Holy Spirit take up residence inside you, and begin the life-long transformation of drawing you away from sin, and into a life of righteousness as you take on the **CHARACTER** of God's Son, Jesus Christ ... for this is God's plan so that ...

Our **THOUGHTS** become the **THOUGHTS** of Jesus Christ ...
Our **WORDS** become the **WORDS** of Jesus Christ ...
Our **ACTIONS** become the **ACTIONS** of Jesus Christ ...
Our **PRIORITIES** become the **PRIORITIES** of Jesus Christ.

Are you seeing this **TRANSFORMATION** take place in your life? In **EPHESIANS 3:14-16** Paul prays specifically for the people in the church at Ephesus, and for you and me today, that we'd be **strengthened with power through God's Spirit**. He prays ...

EPHESIANS 3:14-16 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,
¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

The **power of the Holy Spirit** has been the subject of a lot of theology, teaching, and even fear among Christians over the past 2,000 years. And yet, as we and move past all the misinformation and preconceptions about what this means, we can begin to look at the **power of the Holy Spirit** Biblically, objectively, and from a foundation of faith. And as we begin to do this, our fear and trepidation will begin to lift. God tells us in His Word that the source of power we have to live the Christian life with consistency and integrity is found only in His Holy Spirit. So this power shouldn't be something we're afraid of, or embarrassed about. Here are some verses that speak about this **power of the Holy Spirit** that you and I, as followers of Jesus Christ, have living inside of us ...

MICAH 3:8a; LUKE 4:14 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

MICAH 3:8a [Micah speaking] I am filled with power - with the Spirit of the LORD. [emphasis added]

LUKE 4:14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,

After Jesus Christ's resurrection, He told His disciples that this same power He lived and moved in would be available to them. Here's how He put it in **ACTS 1:8** ...

ACTS 1:8 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁸ ... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Praise the Lord, that the **power of the Holy Spirit** can come upon us, filling us ... and then manifest itself in either **OUTWARD, PHYSICAL** or in **INWARD, SPIRITUAL** ways. Here are some examples of the **power of the Holy Spirit** manifesting itself in **OUTWARD, PHYSICAL** ways ...

In **LUKE 1:35** a virgin by the name of Mary conceived Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit just like the angel promised.

In **ACTS 10:38** God led Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to "go everywhere doing good, and heal those oppressed by the devil."

In **ROMANS 15:19** Paul said that Jesus Christ had accomplished "visible signs and wonders in the power of the Holy Spirit."

It's evident from the testimony of Scripture that the **power of the Holy Spirit** can accomplish miraculous things **OUTWARDLY** or **PHYSICALLY**. And we also see this in our own lives, today. This past year, our flock prayed for Penny Salmon, and over time and in very very specific ways, the **power of the Holy Spirit** working miraculously and through the gifts and the hands of her doctors, brought healing to her body - and some of these healings took place before Penny was even born.

But the **power of the Holy Spirit** can be **INWARD** and **SPIRITUAL** as well as **OUTWARD** and **PHYSICAL**, as it performs miracles inside of us, in our soul. Remember that our **SOUL** is made up of three parts ... our **MIND** (how we **THINK**), our **WILL** (how we **DECIDE**), and our **EMOTION** (how we **FEEL**). And when you and I come into relationship with God, our **SOUL** begins the transformation Scripture calls **SANCTIFICATION**, as we become more like Jesus Christ day-by-day, and choice-by-choice.

Gang, I hate to break it to you, but we're corrupt sinners. But God changes us **INWARDLY** and **SPIRITUALLY** through the **power of the Holy Spirit** ... and this transformation is nothing short of miraculous! Please don't ever begin to take this transformation for granted, or think that it's not that big of a deal ... because it is!

Every one of us is bombarded every day by temptation - and we all have our own specific areas where we're vulnerable. It might be sexual, it might be power/control, it might be an addiction of some sort, it might be coveting what we don't own ... but whatever it is, you know your own ***SPIRITUAL ACHILLES HEAL***. But the good news is that God wants to empower us to resist sin through the **power of the Holy Spirit**. And friends, when we invite God's Holy Spirit to help us in this process of change, it's supernatural! Here are some verses from God's Word that explain how temptation works, and how God has made the **power of the Holy Spirit** available to each of us so that we can experience His ***INWARD, SPIRITUAL*** working of in our lives.

GENESIS 4:7 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

⁷ [God speaking to Cain after he killed his brother Abel] If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling. But you did the wrong thing, and now sin is waiting to attack you like a lion. Sin wants to destroy you, but don't let it! [emphasis added]

JAMES 1:14-15 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. Our desires lead us to sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead.

And after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples that this same power that He lived in and moved in would be available to them.

FIRST CORINTHIANS 10:13 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

¹³ The temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.

And flock, believe me when I tell you that just as many temptations come my way, as come your way. It's just as easy for me as a pastor-teacher to fall into temptation, doubt, and sin as it is for you. There's no such thing as ***THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF DISCIPLESHIP***. I have to make up my mind every day, and usually, many times a day, to keep following Jesus, to keep my eyes on Him, to cry out to Him, to press into Him.

Just because I'm a pastor-teacher, doesn't mean it's easier, or more natural for me to maintain a growing, maturing relationship with Jesus Christ than it is for you. When I was graduated from seminary twenty-six years ago, I didn't get a stack of spiritual ***GET OUT OF JAIL FREE CARDS***. No way. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a daily decision for ***EVERY SINGLE FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST*** ... no exceptions.

But praise God, that all of us have access to the **power of the Holy Spirit** ... and this power, whether it's bringing about ***OUTWARD, PHYSICAL CHANGES*** or ***INWARD, SPIRITUAL CHANGES***, is real, and it's the source of the hope we need to make it through this life. Which brings us to our **THIRD FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

Let's invite the Holy Spirit to strengthen us with His power from the inside out. This is the road God wants to equip us to walk as His followers. And the outcome of the supernatural strengthening that God wants to pour *INTO US* and *OUT OF US* is critical to us living the lives He calls us to live.

Paul goes into detail in the next three verses about the outcome of the power of the Holy Spirit that God wants *FLOWING OUT OF US* in lives of worship and service.

EPHESIANS 3:17-19 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul is saying that as we're strengthened with the power of God's Spirit, three important things will begin to happen to us that will only begin changing everything in both our faith and in our lives ...

1. Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith.
2. We will be able to comprehend the love of Christ.
3. And we'll be filled up to all the fullness of God.

EPHESIANS 3:17a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

^{17a} so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

FIRST, when you and I are strengthened with the power of God's Spirit, Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith. Remember Jesus' words in JOHN 14:23?

JOHN 14:23 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

²³ If people love Me, they will obey My teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make Our home with them.

What an awesome verse. When we come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we become what the Apostle Peter called in SECOND PETER 1:4, "partakers in God's divine life." And it's this life of God inside of us, this power of the Holy Spirit working in us from the inside out, that equips us to live out our faith in ways that are real and consistent, as opposed to fake and inconsistent.

There are two ancient Greek words that express the idea of "living in". One of these words has the idea of a stranger moving in, settling down, and making that new place their permanent home. But the word dwell Paul uses in EPHESIANS 3:17a, is the Greek word *katoikeo*, and it means to settle into a permanent home, for the

purpose of governing. Gang, Jesus doesn't just want to be a *visitor* in our lives, an occasional *guest* we order around and tell what to do. Jesus wants to move in permanently, to settle into us permanently, and to rule our lives permanently.

And we need spiritual strength, to let **Christ dwell** in us, because there's something inside of us that resists Christ's indwelling, ruling presence and the **power of the Holy Spirit**. You know what it's like to go somewhere and hope that the Jesus **dwelling** inside of you isn't there and can't see what you're doing. I can see every one of you here this morning and I can see that you're all human beings, just like me ... and so I know that you know what I'm talking about. But praise God, we can learn to let God make His home inside us, and we can learn to let the **power of the Holy Spirit** teach us how to be victorious over sin and put into practice the power and faith He gives us.

It's sad but true that many Christians have invited Jesus Christ to be their Savior but because of the choices they make, they don't allow Jesus Christ to feel **at home** in them. And gang, when we do this, what we're essentially doing is keeping Jesus shut down and locked out of our lives. And I see a **FOURTH FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON

When we're strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ will truly dwell in our hearts - settling into the core of who we are, making His home in us, and governing our lives. Invite it to happen, and then let it happen. Grow in your faith, becoming the person God has designed you to become in Him.

FIRST, when you and I are strengthened with the power of God's Spirit, Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith ... and **SECOND**, we'll be able to comprehend the love of Christ.

EPHESIANS 3:17b-19a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

^{17b} **and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,**
¹⁸ **may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,**
^{19a} **and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**

I love how Paul gives us two examples in these three verses that illustrate the strengthening force of the love of Jesus Christ. **FIRST** he tells us in **v. 17b** that God's love is stronger than the roots of a massive tree that hold it up in the middle of wind-storms. And **SECOND**, using the illustration of **the breadth and length and height and depth**, Paul tells us in **v. 18** that God's love is like a firm foundation and that we can build the walls of our lives on, knowing that they'll stand strong and secure. Oh, glory to God that you and I have the power of the God's love.

ILLUSTRATION ... One day while Charles Spurgeon was walking through the English countryside with a friend he noticed a barn with a weather vane on its roof. At the top of the vane were the words: **GOD IS LOVE**. Spurgeon remarked to his companion that he thought

this was a rather inappropriate place for such a message. “Weather vanes are changeable,” he said, “but God’s love is constant.”

“I don’t agree with you about those words, Charles,” replied his friend. “You misunderstood the meaning. That sign is symbolizing the truth that regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love.”

The love God has for us has **breadth**, or **width**, in that it covers over and **forgives all our sins** ([ISAIAH 53:6](#); [JOHN 1:29, 36](#)), so that **all things can work together for His purposes** ([ROMANS 8:28](#)). And gang, when you or I doubt God’s forgiveness we narrow down our understanding of the width of the river of God’s love.

The love God has for us also has **length**. Think about when God started loving you. [ROMANS 5:8](#) says, “But God showed how much He loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful.” And how long is God’s love for us? [JEREMIAH 31:3](#) says, “I love you with a love that will last forever.”

The love God has for us also has **depth**. [PHILIPPIANS 2:7-8](#) says that Jesus loved us so much that **He died on the cross for us**. And friends, you can’t go any lower than dying on a cross. And that’s how deep the love of God is for us.

And finally, the love God has for us also has **height**. How high does God’s love lift us? Paul taught in [EPHESIANS 2:6](#) that it “lifts us up to heavenly places where we’re seated with Christ.”

FIRST, when you and I are strengthened with the power of God’s Spirit, Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith ... **SECOND**, we’ll be able to comprehend the love of Christ ... and **THIRD**, we’ll be filled up to all the fullness of God.

[EPHESIANS 3:19b](#) (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

^{19b} and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Friends, how can we even begin to talk about, illustrate, or define the **fullness of God**? I think that some portions of God’s Word from *The New Testament* in which this **fullness** is defined, will help us see what Paul’s talking about here when he’s talking about ...

[FIRST PETER 1:2](#); [ROMANS 15:13](#); [EPHESIANS 5:18](#); [PHILIPPIANS 1:11](#)
(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

² May grace and peace be yours in full measure! ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace. ¹⁸ be filled by the Spirit ... ¹¹ be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

[COLOSSIANS 1:9](#); [FIRST THESSALONIANS 1:5](#); [COLOSSIANS 4:12](#)
(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

⁹ we are asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will. ⁵ Have full conviction ... ¹² so that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

And this list can go on and on! Don't you desire to be **are strengthened with the fullness and the power of God's Spirit?** Many people think it's impossible, saying, "God would never give me all that. I'll never be able to be a Christian like that." But look at the last two verses on **EPHESIANS 3** ...

EPHESIANS 3:20-21 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Gang, if you desire this work of the Holy Spirit in your life today, ask God. He'll give to you, because He's your loving Father. Paul's prayer, and the requests that he's making here aren't based on who he is, but on who God is. Our limited, natural minds will always fall short of being able to think of or expect or even desire all that God can do and wants to do. But God's ability is based on who He is - and He is the God of the universe, the God of the seemingly impossible, the God of you and of me.

I like to think that these last two verses aren't the doxology or the benediction of only this prayer, but of everything Paul has taught in **EPHESIANS 1-3**. Because when it comes to all that Paul has taught us so far, God is the only one Who can bring such marvelous things to pass. Paul knew that God could do great things, and so he asked for great things. And this same power, the **power of God's Spirit** that will answer these prayers, is the same power that is at work inside of us as followers of Jesus Christ.

And so it's no wonder that Paul signs off this chapter by saying in **v. 21** ... **to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.**

NEXT SUNDAY ... CHRISTIANITY 101 ... ANSWERS TO YOUR "GOD AND FAITH QUESTIONS." COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!