

The Church Is A Brotherhood

Ephesians 3:1-21

Icebreaker:

You get to have dinner tonight with one person in the Bible (except for Jesus, since you can already have dinner with him). Who will you choose?

The Study:

Paul wrote Ephesians to teach us to see the Church through God's eyes. Throughout this letter, Paul will use a variety of metaphors (word-pictures) to describe the Church. When we're finished with Ephesians, hopefully you'll remember the phrase:

Brotherhood of Body-Building Battalion Brides

After considering the Church as a Body and a Building in chapter 2, in chapter 3 he introduces the concept of the Church as a family, or *brotherhood (and sisterhood!)*. This idea teaches us a powerful way to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but first Paul takes us on a little detour, with even more wonders to see.



Paul's Imprisonment (vss. 1-13)

Read verses 1-13 straight through. In these verses Paul shares 4 things that blow his mind about Christianity.

1. Thinking about his *Conversion* and his *Call To Ministry*

This is what Paul is referring to in verse 2. As a Christian and an apostle, he is but a "steward of God's grace". The same is true for us. Think of your conversion story. In what ways is your coming home to Jesus the result of God's grace on your life?

2. Thinking about how he is one of the first to understand the full arc of salvation history, which includes Jews and Gentiles. This is what verses 3-6 are about. Paul uses the word "mystery" to describe all that God was doing throughout the Old Testament age. Why did God raise up the Jews? And what did he think about the Gentiles? No one could tell you for sure, until Jesus came. And like a great puzzle now completed, you could then see the picture.

"The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." In what ways should seeing the full arc of salvation history cause us to marvel?

3. Thinking about how the Church is God's Plan-A for bringing this lost world back to him.

This is what verses 7-10 are about. Read verse 10 three or four times in a row. Based on everything we've talked about so far in our Ephesians study, write out in one sentence your idea of what God thinks about the Church. Then ask yourself: Is this what I think about the Church?

4. Thinking about how God want to use each one of us – even little 'ole me – to help fulfill his eternal plan.

This is what verses 11-13 are about. Paul knows that God is using him, but he wants his readers to understand that they too have access to God through their faith. They too get to play a part in God's purposes.

Do you believe this? Why or why not?

Paul's Prayer (vss. 14-21)

Read verses 14-21 straight through. Paul is so blown away by what he's been thinking about, that all he can do is fall down before God in worship and prayer.

5. In verse 14, Paul introduces the concept of the church as a family. But first, he says that every family in heaven and on earth is named/known/owned by God. Back then, it was hard for people to believe this, because people thought there were too many *gods* (so the idea of *one God* creating everyone seemed absurd.) Today, it's hard for people to believe this because we think there are too many *people* (so how can one God manage all this?) How about you? How is it possible to believe that the one God has time, interest, ability and power to know your name, and care for you?

In verses 16-19, Paul prays for his Ephesian church family. There are at least three specific requests we can identify here. If ever you want to know how to pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ, you might want to start with these three things.

- **He prays for God to strengthen them from the inside out (in their 'inner beings', vs. 16)**

6. While we all need outward things (food, clothing, shelter, jobs, medicine, etc.), most of the greatest threats we face in life come from inside of us. What did Jesus say are the sort of things that can make a mess of our lives (*make us unclean*)? Read Matthew 10:16-20.

7. When we pray for someone to be "strengthened in their inner being", what are we actually asking for? Write down some ideas.

- **He prays for God to root them and ground them in Christ's love (vss. 17-18).**

8. How does the world around us typically define love today? How does this contrast with the Bible's definition of love? (read 1 John 4:7-8, John 13:34)

9. Because love is an objective reality rooted in God's very nature (not a subjective feeling rooted in a person's private affections and identity), the apostles were able to provide very detailed lists of what Christian love is, and is not. Skim some of these lists, and share some observations:

What Love Is Not:

Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:25-32 (also contains what love is); Colossians 3:5-11

What Love Is:

Romans 12:9-21; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 4:25-32 (also contains what love is not); Colossians 3:12-17

- **He prays for God to fill them with all his fullness (vss. 19).**

10. Have you ever experienced what it's like to be spiritually 'running on empty'? Why do you think you found yourself this way?

11. How can being an active part of a church family, interacting with Christian brothers and sisters, help you to be more filled with God's fullness? (And the question could be asked of the first two prayer requests as well.)

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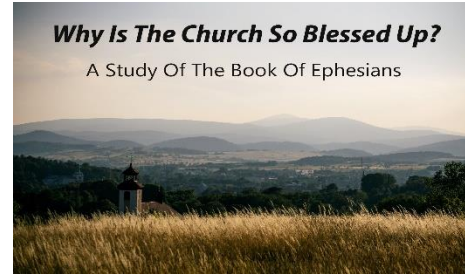
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