



Ephesians

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...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19

The verse here forms a play on the words “know” and “knowledge” which form a paradox, and yet which reveal certain truths. Paul, filled with a desire to express the infinite nature of what God has done for us, had just given one paradox. It is that we –

“...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height...” (3:18)

It is impossible to comprehend that which is infinite. And so he stopped as if gasping and then moved on to this verse. He desires that we are “to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.” The “to know” indicates learning through experience. This is in the aorist tense. The “knowledge” indicates having grasped what should be known. However, if what should be known is infinite, then we cannot ever fully learn through experience what we are being asked to know. What he is saying then is that we are to learn through continued experience, at any given time, what God is revealing of Himself in the love of Christ. As Charles Ellicott states it –

“...so that they may always go on from faith to faith, from knowledge to knowledge, and yet find new depths still to be fathomed.”

Like the air that fills the bellows, so the love of Christ should fill the mind and soul, and yet there is an inexpressible amount of air on the outside, still untapped. And so we should again fill our mind and soul in order to obtain more knowledge. And then we should repeat this

process again and again, for all eternity – ever striving to grasp what can never be truly understood. No matter how long we live in the ages of ages to come, we will still be finite. We will never entirely attain the full knowledge of the love of God in Christ.

However, we should forever continue to pursue it so that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Again, it is another paradoxical statement. How can one who is finite be filled with the infinite? Though it is impossible, it is what we are being asked to do. Again, an aorist verb is used for “filled.” We should be like the open vessel into which is poured the stream of flowing water. Though the water spills out the top, new water comes in to replace it, filling and filling until the eternal ages have come and gone and yet the flow keeps coming.

This is the splendor of what God offers to reveal to us as we contemplate His infinite goodness towards us in Christ Jesus. And this is what Paul asks us to know and to be filled with.

Life application: Let the goodness of God in all its fullness come and fill you, even to overflowing, and then... let Him continue to fill you some more. Never cease being filled with the glorious love of God in Christ Jesus.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Ephesians 3:20

Paul bursts into a doxology of praise as he is often seen to do. As he writes his epistles, it is apparent that the process of writing (or dictating) his thoughts helps him to unpack the wonder of what God has done in Christ. His emotions rise to such a crescendo that he literally bursts out with words of praise. Such is the case here as he ponders the enormity of what God has done.

The words, “Now to Him,” are speaking of God the Father as seen in verse 14. It is He “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly.” This is a compound adverb which is only found here and twice in 1 Thessalonians. It shows the incomprehensible nature of what God can do. What is done by Him is beyond anything which could have been expected or anticipated. Vincent’s Word studies argues that these words are an independent clause –

“Read the whole, ‘Unto Him who is able to do beyond all, exceedingly above that which,’ etc.”
Vincent’s Word Studies

In other words, they are a contemplative thought of Paul which stops short because of an inability to continue for a moment. It would be as if someone were thinking on the marvel of what God is. In doing so, he stops and says, “God is so great; amazingly marvelously great... greater than I can describe!”

From that high note, he recovers himself and then continues on with the superlative nature of what God is capable of doing. He says, "...above all that we ask or think." When we petition God for the most incredible of things, God is able to meet those prayers and even go beyond what we have asked for. And while praying, our thoughts are on our highest hopes. But God's ability to perform exceeds even those highest of hopes.

However, it is important to remember that Paul ties "ask" and "think" in with what God is "able" to do, not with what He will actually do. Sometimes our prayers are not in accord with His Divine will. If this is the case, then we cannot expect that they will be answered in the way we wish. Rather, what He is able to do is "according to the power that works in us."

God is working in us according to His will and His predetermined end. There are times when our desires meet that will, and there are times when they will not. But through it all, His magnificent will is being worked out and we will realize the superlative nature of His workings at the end.

Life application: God is God; we are man. Let us always make our petitions known to God in humility and with high expectation but let us also acknowledge to Him that "Your will be done, O God." We should never "claim" anything in His name. It is presumptuous and arrogant to do so. Instead, let us allow Him to direct His will without us snapping fingers of pride.

to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:21

The words "to Him" are speaking, as in the previous verse, about God the Father who has orchestrated all things according to His wisdom for the redemption of mankind. It is He who has done, exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (verse 20), and to whom belongs "the glory in the church."

All credit is given to God in the church concerning our redemption and eternal status where we will live in His presence. No credit can be taken for our entry into this exalted and glorious edifice, and no credit can be taken for our position within it. God has appointed all things according to His wisdom, and we are merely the recipients of this marvelous grace which has come "by Christ Jesus." The word "by" is arguably better rendered as "in." The work has been done by Him, and we are in Him now as members of the church.

And because we are members of this body who are in Him, we shall exalt and give glory to God for "all generations, forever and ever." Here Paul has invented a phrase which attempts, failingly, to explain the eternal state that we have been brought into. Albert Barnes says that, "There is a richness and amplification of language here which shows that his heart was full of the subject, and that it was difficult to find words to express his conceptions. It means, in the strongest sense, forever."

A literal translation would be "...unto all the generations of the age of the ages" (Vincent's Word Studies). God's plan had a beginning in the stream of time, but there shall be no end to it. The redeemed of the Lord shall walk in His presence for time without end, ever searching out the manifold wisdom and glory of God. It is the wondrous hope and expectation that we now possess because of the work of God in Christ.

Life application: If you are of the redeemed of the Lord, then praise Him! You will be doing it for all eternity, and so you might as well get started with that now. Be pleased to give God all the credit He is due for the marvelous gift of eternal life. Be pleased to hail the name of Jesus!

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, Ephesians 4:1

The word "therefore" is given based on all that he has thus far said in the epistle. He is asking them to consider all that he has written and to take it into consideration. This is made especially poignant by the words "I... the prisoner of the Lord." The Greek reads "in the Lord." Though he was a prisoner under Nero, it was because of his status "in the Lord" that he was imprisoned. It is what the Lord had willed for his life at that time, and his service would be best used from prison.

This may seem contradictory, but Joseph was once imprisoned and it was that time of incarceration that eventually led him to becoming the second highest in the land of Egypt. God was using his time in prison for a greater purpose, and the same was true with Paul who was also being used in this manner. Based on that status, meaning a prisoner in the Lord, he desired them to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

If Paul's incarceration was part of God's plan, then they could look at his position which would otherwise seem ignoble, and they could then consider that whatever position they were in, they too could find it a place of honor because of the Lord's positioning them where they were. In that position, be it high or lowly, they could then walk in that worthy manner. If high, they would conduct themselves with humility. If low, they would conduct themselves with dignity.

Paul has shown them that position in this world is irrelevant in regards to position in Christ. This is what he is relaying to them with his "therefore." They should consider themselves as Christians first and foremost, and conduct their walk in that regard.

Life application: It is a common thing for people to get swept up in an almost "idol worship" concerning pastors, preachers, and teachers of the Bible. But it should not be this way. Rather, some of the seemingly lowliest of the church may be the ones who are walking in the most worthy manner in regards to their calling. Let us consider all according to how they honor the Lord, regardless of their position or title.

Lord God, it is wonderful to know that we are all accepted by You because of the Lord Jesus. It doesn't matter how wealthy we are, how big of a house we have, what color we are, or what our job is. These are worldly things. You look at us based on how we walk according to our calling, and not by these temporary divisions of life. Be pleased to be glorified through how we present our lives as Christians, and help us always to desire Your glory and honor above all else. Amen.

...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
Ephesians 4:2

What Paul will now state is an explanation of what it means to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” What he will say is very similar to what he also wrote to those in Colossae –

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;” Colossians 3:12

His words are also tied in very closely to Jesus' words which run through the Beatitudes. They are what we are expected to live out in this walk of life in Christ. In this verse, he begins with what might be termed “passive graces.” In other words, they are things that we less actively do, but rather they reflect a passive attitude. They are to be modeled on those things which Christ, who went before us, also displayed in their perfect sense.

He begins with “lowliness.” This is an attitude of the mind where we don't put ourselves on a pedestal, but rather we exalt those around us above ourselves. He writes of this attitude of diminishing one's own importance in Romans 12 –

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3

His next thought is that of “gentleness.” It is a meekness of the person which is willing to suffer injury without retaliation and without seeking revenge. Our gentleness should exude out of us when dealing with those around us just as Christ also did. He didn't retaliate against those who came against Him, but He suffered their degradation and punishment.

“Longsuffering” is the same thought as that which he gave in 1 Corinthians 13:4. It is a passive action, and it is something that requires perseverance. We should be willing to put up with a constant stream of trials and yet be willing to praise God through them. Job suffered as much as almost anyone, and yet he made this resolute proclamation –

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job 1:21

Finally in this verse, he notes that our walk should include the attitude of “bearing one another in love.” The word indicates a purposeful endeavoring in our attitude. We should have an earnest desire to exert ourselves in love in order to “secure a thing not lightly obtained” (Albert Barnes). People can wear us out with their own pet peeves, insecurities, jealousies, and the like. In our walk, we should be willing to bear such things in love rather than breaking down and shooting forth darts of anger.

Life application: Paul’s words are a tough thing to live out, but they are written under the inspiration of the Spirit and are thus things that we are being asked to do because they are what God approves of, and therefore expects of us. Let us endeavor to the utmost to act in accord with these precepts.

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3

These words complete the list of things by which one will be able “to walk worthy of the calling with which” he was called. In order to do this, he notes that we should be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.” The word “endeavoring” doesn’t really share the sense of the original which indicates “to make speed.” Thus something like “haste to keep the unity of the Spirit” is more in line with Paul’s intent. We should strive with all willingness and speed to ensure such unity.

This “unity of the Spirit” isn’t referring to a possible division of the Holy Spirit, but rather any division of those sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul has been speaking of the church as one body, and that we are all members of one household. Therefore, we should be united in our conduct and our walk because of this.

However, this brings in an obvious difficulty. When doctrine is lacking, or the word of God is mishandled (either unintentionally or intentionally) there can be no true unity of the Spirit. This is seen throughout the epistles and even in the seven letters to the seven churches. In Romans 16:17, Paul says –

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

Therefore, it is understood that such divisions will exist; a lack of unity is inevitable. Paul doesn’t say that this cannot occur. Rather, he instructs that at times it must occur. What he is asking of us in this verse is that we work with all speed to not let this happen when

circumstances so dictate. It is our job to strive for felicity among the brethren and to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

This “bond of peace” that he speaks of probably refers back to Chapter 2 –

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace...” Ephesians 2:14, 15

Where there once was the great division of Jew and Gentile, Christ had made peace. If such an immense source of enmity could be ended through His work, then all others are also possible as well. However, it is incumbent on the offender as much as the offended to be willing to strive for this peace; something which is less likely to occur. Someone who holds to a particular incorrect doctrine will often double down on their stand rather than seeing reason. Pride steps in and is unwilling to admit wrong. Thus the bad doctrine is then passed on to others and it becomes a larger and larger separation.

This is why there are so many denominations with so many unfavorable doctrines to contend with. Some are heretical; some are doctrinally unsound; some are simply nutty pet peeves. It is only through a pure and wholehearted pursuit of Christ that these things will ever be set aside. As God is love, Colossians 3 shows us how this will be effected –

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” Colossians 3:14

Putting on love is what will unite the Spirit. It must be the highest love, that of love for Christ and His word, which brings this about. If we are willing to put Him first, then the incorrect doctrines will be set aside for purity of doctrine which stems from Him.

Life application: Paul admonishes us to strive for unity, but he never asks us to do this at the expense of proper doctrine. The world of ecumenicalism errs because it puts unity above purity of doctrine. This is a bad place to be. The words of Scripture ask us to have our allegiances aligned properly. Doctrine matters more than false unity.