

STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY THREE: Ephesians 3:7-4:6

Study Three, Part One

⁷I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

3:7 – Paul explained how he was able to do what he did, and Paul did a lot. Someone referred to the Roman Emperor Nero's famous persecution of the Church as "hell's response to Paul's preaching." Paul single-handedly attacked not only Jewish tradition but pagan polytheism, and he did it by the "working of his power." The word "working" is the Greek word "energeia." It is where we get our English word "energy." Paul had divine energy. When you function in your purpose, you have divine energy too.

When do sense this "divine energy?" What are you doing when you sense it? How can you do that more often?

God would not intend for you to function in this energy every now and then. He equipped you to know His will be recognizing and surrendering to this energy. I have found that the energy is most often accompanied with joy, so that you will be motivated to seek your joy by doing your assigned purpose.

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

If you have God's joy, then you have His strength, which enables you to do things in a supernatural manner. If you don't have His joy, then you also don't have His strength and the only substitute for His strength is your own. And your own strength is a poor, inadequate substitute. **Where is your strength limited in what you do and where is His strength unlimited?** You want to function in the latter as much as possible.

3:8&9 – I never noticed before this study how Paul repeated himself in this letter. Here he was once again spelling out his understanding of the mystery that God was now opening the way to Him for the Gentiles. **Why did he repeat it?** Perhaps because it was so misunderstood. And this mystery was revealed through the Scriptures and ministry of Paul and the other apostles.

Paul referred to himself as "the least of all God's people." This was not humility, but rather a statement of fact. Keep in mind that as Saul, he had people persecuted and killed believers and thought he was doing God a favor. I don't think Paul ever lost sight of who

he had been. Don't forget who you were either. Don't dwell on it, but remember how far God has brought you and what He has done for you.

Study Three, Part Two

¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

3:10&11 – Paul introduced another reason for God's administration of grace through Paul's wisdom, and that was to show His manifold wisdom to rulers and authorities in heavenly places. That means that some of what happens to you and me isn't intended for you and me, or even the others around us. It is a cosmic display to fallen as well as holy angels to reveal what God is doing and has done. We cannot always see why God is doing what He is doing but we are not alone here on earth. There is a whole other world watching and marveling or agonizing over God's goodness. That is why we need to thank Him in all things because He may be fulfilling some plan that is invisible to us, but very visible in heavenly places. **Can you thank Him today in the midst of what He is doing in your life?**

This represents the seventeenth reference to "in him" or "in Christ" that Paul made since he began the letter. I think we can safely say that the main theme of the letter is the "in Christ" life. It is not the "in church" life, or the "in relationship" life, or the "in covenant" life or any other "in doctrine" life. Paul wanted the Ephesians and therefore you and I to know that the essence of our life now is "in Him." **Are you living in and for Christ or in and for something or someone else?** Don't assume that the answer is "For Christ."

3:12 – I know I am beginning to sound like a broken record, but here are two more references to "in him." It should be difficult for you to know where you end and God begins in all you do. In other words, your life should be supernaturally natural. You are in Him and it is through faith that you approach God. How can you approach someone, however, in whom you already live? It would be like a fish "approaching" the water. The fish is already in the water, intimate with the water and depending on the water for life itself. That is an analogy of our relationship with God. You are in him

That means that you can approach God with freedom and confidence. **Are you free to go to God? Do you have confidence when you do that He welcomes and hears you?** I hope you see that you are already in Him so coming to Him is simply a term that should not indicate you are far away and must approach from afar. You are already in Him! Here is what this truth should do for you and your relationship with Him:

- Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not

- have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16-18).
- “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:32-36).
 - Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

Study Three, Part Three

¹³I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. ¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

3:13 – Paul had an interesting perspective on his suffering. He was writing from prison yet he was encouraging those who were on the outside. I have found when you are in Christ and suffering, there is a grace that enables you to minister to others who may feel bad about what you're going through! That is the grace of God.

Are you suffering? Then try to find some way, not to understand why, but how you can minister to someone else. Your suffering can be someone else's life support. That may be hard to comprehend, so let's look at what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you

is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2 Corinthians 1:3-11).

3:14&15 – For what reason does Paul kneel before the Father? I don't think the reason is in what he had already written but what he was about to write in verse 16 and beyond. Paul prayed with purpose and had a definite goal in mind when he prayed for those under his authority. **Do you have a prayer list? Do you have something to remind you what your prayer goals are for family, church, world missions, evangelism and country? Why not? Why not develop one and keep it in your Bible or “prayer closet?”**

God is a Father and we take our name and identity from Him, not from a denomination or church movement. **How do you identify yourself? As a follower of Father through Christ, or as a member of a man-made organization?** I am saying that the organization is wrong or a bad thing, only that it should not be your source of identity.

Study Three, Part Four

¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

3:16&17 – Paul prayed for their inner being to be strengthened by the Spirit. That must mean that our inner being can be in a weakened state for some reason. **How is your inner being doing?** Don't just pay attention to your outer body's well-being, but pay even more attention to the well-being of your inner person. **What energizes you internally? Do you know? Why aren't you doing that more often? How can you do it more so you can be spiritually strengthened?** I have found that what strengthens one person may not strengthen another. Find out what “works” for you and be involved in it as often as possible!

Christ dwells in us through faith! Christ is in us and we are in Him. No other religion, philosophy or movement can offer what we have through Christ. Every other religion is trying to find Him. In Christianity, He not only found us but also lives in us, in our

human flesh. If that doesn't make you worship and say "Hallelujah!" then you are spiritually deficient.

3:18 – This is Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians. He wanted their power to be rooted and established in love. A man named Lord Acton once said that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The older I get, the more I see the truth in this statement. Even the power of the Spirit *must* be rooted in love, so that the power will be used for the benefit of others and not self. I heard a pastor say one time, "It's hard to be humble when you're good." When you have success, even in the power of God's Spirit, it is hard not to be proud about it or to think that somehow you caused or earned it.

It is of note that we need power to understand the love of God. You cannot understand it on your own; you need help. That is because it is so wonderful, so unlike anything human. It is a gift from God.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

3:19 – Paul wanted his readers to know this love, but not know it in an intellectual manner. God's love surpasses knowledge. Paul wrote in another epistle,

"Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Are you "puffed up" from knowledge? Don't answer too quickly.

Paul also wanted his readers to be filled with the measure of the fullness of Christ. **What does this mean? How can I be filled to this fullness?** I cannot receive all that God is, but I can receive all that He has intended for me. That is why I want to write, travel, preach, do and be as much as God intends for me to do and be. I cannot do all this, however, in isolation. I must do this in community, "with all the saints" as he wrote in verse 18. Are you being all that you can be in the context of a local church? **If not, why not?**

Study Three, Part Five

²⁰Now 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, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

3:20&21 – God cannot always do immeasurably more than you ask or think. The immeasurable dynamic of God's power is *only* released "according to the power that works in us." If you have no power, then God will not go beyond what you can ask or think. Also notice how we have "individualized" this promise. By that I mean that we often think that God can do for or through *me* something beyond my imagination. Instead, Paul wrote that God can do the great things for *us*. It is the community aspect

that releases God's power. Could that be why there is so much opposition to church unity?

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:19-20).

The glory in the church belongs to Jesus and anyone with whom He chooses to share it. It is not ours to take, but His to give. Leaders must insure that they are not "moving in" on Jesus' glory. Yet we don't have to be phony about it, always saying that we are giving glory to God. That is religious. Instead we can preach Jesus continually and with great grace and humility. God wants to share glory in the church and in every generation.

Jesus explained how He gave glory to the Father in John's gospel. It is the same way that you will bring God glory:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:1-4).

Jesus finished the work the Father assigned to Him and that brought God glory. **Are you finishing up or working on your assigned duties from God? Do you know your purpose? Are you fulfilling it? What is stopping you?**

Study Three, Part Six

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

4:1 – As mentioned earlier, you don't have to be in prison to be a prisoner for the Lord. You can be a prisoner to God's purpose and grace in your life, doing what it is that He created you to do. Here Paul shifted away from his theological teaching and emphasized more of the actions and attitudes that his theology should produce in the lives of the believers. We should live a life worthy of and consistent with the high calling he described in the first three chapters.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:22-25).

You can know it is right to be generous yet not give. You may know it is right to serve, yet sit and watch television, not involved in the lives of those around you. You can know a lot of things that you should do, but unless you do them, they are no benefit to you or others.

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17).

4:2 – Paul urged his readers to be gentle and humble. It is always a decision to be humble and meek, but it requires the grace of God to actually be those things. You decide that’s what you want to be, admit to God that you cannot achieve them on your own, and then invite God’s presence to develop those attitudes and behaviors in your heart and life.

So then, it is safe to say that humility is part work and part grace. I can decide to humble myself, but true humility is God-given. **Why would Paul urge you to be patient and to bear with one another unless he knew you were going to need that exhortation and that you could do something about it?** People will always “step on your toes,” sometimes without realizing they have done so. Your response must always be gracious and forgiving. Humility and meekness are greatly honored by the Lord, as seen in this story from the life of Moses:

"Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.

“But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy (Numbers 12:2-10).

4:3 – Unity with your fellow believers requires effort on your part. You must work at it; it is not a gift of God. And given the reality of verse two, the opportunities for disunity and offense are all too prevalent! The Church is the only entity in the world that encounters the level of spiritual warfare that it does. Why? Because the “gates of hell” are attacking it! Most people interpret Jesus’ promise that the gates of hell will not

prevail against the church to mean that the gates of hell will not *try* to prevail. That is not correct. Hell will certainly attempt to prevail and that may lead to some very intense times where it is be hard to maintain unity.

How unified are you with other believers? What can you do to improve? Are there any attitudes that you need to change to enhance your unity with others? It is not a mark of spirituality that you are an independent thinker. It is a mark of carnality!

Study Three, Part Seven

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

4:4-6 – Paul outlined the elements of unity in the body of Christ. It is interesting that these things have actually been among the most divisive topics in the church: the Spirit, baptism, and the Body or Church itself. How can you explain this phenomenon apart from spiritual warfare? You cannot. The devil, the great enemy of the church, knows that disunity and disagreement about these issues has weakened and will continue to weaken the church. Very often, Christians have fought other Christians over non-essential aspects of the Spirit, baptism and the Church.

There is great variety and diversity in God’s body, and that is as it should be. There is a lot of latitude in many interpretations of things like the end times, grace, sanctification and church government. It is interesting that every group considers their interpretation the correct one, without assuming that they all may have an element of the truth. It is like two people reporting on one news event. Both will see the truth, but they may not see all of it, and they will report based on what they see. That doesn’t make one any less truthful.

The main essentials of the faith are clear and as long as those are held, then there should be charity and unity among believers. Where there can be no disunity, however, is in regards to the person of Jesus, His birth, death and resurrection. Most cults and heresies can be attributed to a faulty “Christology” or doctrine of Christ.

I have determined that, while I may disagree with some believers over their interpretations of these three issues, I will be diligent to maintain the unity of the Spirit. As I like to say, “I am for everybody if they are part of the body.” And I interpret those who belong to the body to be many, many denominations and sects that hold a wide variety of interpretations about the Spirit, the body and baptism.

Where do you need to work on your spirit of unity? What groups within the Church don’t you understand and therefore don’t like or trust? Those groups may even be in your own local church! Remember, we are facing a spiritual enemy who is shrewd and is looking to weaken and discredit God’s Church. Don’t play into his plan by contributing to a fractured Church. Pay attention to what the psalmist wrote:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore (Psalm 133:1-3).