

## The Power

When you hear the word POWER, what comes to mind?

- Big motor? Lots of torque & Horsepower?
- Bench-pressing 500 lbs?
- .50 caliber rifle?

For this reason I kneel before the Father <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. <sup>16</sup> I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, <sup>19</sup> and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21 (CSB)

For most of my teenage years & early twenties I thought I was going to be a Chaplain in the military.

- I loved the brotherhood that the Military provides
- High impact/adrenaline that comes with the smell of gunpowder on the firing range, the sound of mortar fire
- So when I was starting off my ministry career I just KNEW I was going to be spending a short time in ministry in the local church & then going into the Military.
  - The Lord had other plans.

**POWER:** the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.

Paul was in love with the local church. And he had a desire for the Jewish people but they were rejecting his message. So God gave him a passion & love for the Gentiles!

## God's got this. (v. 20)

“Rather than a small Jesus tucked away somewhere in our souls, the text assumes the presence of one who gives shape and strength at the core of our being, who takes up residence in and redefines us.” (Snodgrass)

God's got this...but “according to the power that works in us.”

- Know that God isn't some Genie in a bottle, how do we access God's power in our lives? The better way of putting it is, how do we allow God's power to work through us & impact our lives & our situations?

God's got this but prayer is required.

- During this season in our church life, prayer will be especially important.

God's got this when God's got our lives.

- Surrender is a necessity.

When it comes to your marriage; God's got this. When you let Him.

- When you love your spouse more than your love yourself.
- When you follow God's instructions.

When it comes to your children; God's got this.

- When you give them over to Him.

When it comes to your finances; God's got this.

- When you follow Biblical principals.

God's got this church!

## God's got the future of this church.

- It never rested in my hands; praise God!
- God has always been the one doing the work & producing the fruit.
  - However we must surrender to Him to allow him to work through us!
- Keep seeking the Lord.
- Keep proclaiming Christ.
  - Keep Loving God.
  - Keep Loving Others
  - Keep Serving All
- And when you do...God's got this.

## The Benediction (Eph. 3:20–21)

After contemplating such a marvelous spiritual experience, it is no wonder Paul bursts forth in a doxology, a fitting benediction to such a prayer. Note again the trinitarian emphasis in this benediction: Paul prays to God the Father, concerning the indwelling power of God the Spirit, made available through God the Son.

Perhaps the best way for us to grasp some of the greatness of this doxology is to look at it in outlined form:

Now unto Him that is  
able to do *all*  
*above* all  
*abundantly* above all  
*exceeding* abundantly above all

Paul seems to want to use every word possible to convey to us the vastness of God's power as found in Jesus Christ. He has ended each of the two previous chapters with praise to God for His great victory in Christ. He tells us that Christ's power is so great He arose from the dead and ascended *far above all* (Eph. 1:19–23). He teaches us that His power is so great He has reconciled Jews and Gentiles to each other, and to God; and that He is now building a temple to the eternal glory of God (Eph. 2:19–22). But in the paragraph before us, Paul shares the exciting truth that this *far above all* power is available to us! It is even "above all that we ask or think." In other words, the power of Christ, like the love of Christ, is beyond human understanding or measurement. And this is just the kind of power you and I need if we are to walk and war in victory.

The word "power" is again *dunamis*, which we met back in Ephesians 3:7; and "working" is *energeia* (energy) found in Ephesians 1:11, 19; 2:2; 3:7; and 4:16. Some power is dormant; it is available, but not being used, such as the power stored in a battery. But God's energy is effectual power—power at work in our lives. This power works *in* us, in the inner man (Eph. 3:16). Philippians 2:12–13 are parallel verses, so be sure to read them. It is the Holy Spirit who releases the resurrection power of Christ in our lives.

One winter day, I had an important engagement in Chicago, and the evening before the area was hit by a severe snowstorm. I did not have a garage, so my car was not only covered with snow, but heavy cakes of ice had formed under the fenders and bumpers. These ice cakes I simply kicked off, after I had swept off the car. I drove to the gas station to fill the tank. When I pushed the button on the dashboard to open the gas cap, it didn't work. No matter how hard or often I pushed, the cap stayed shut. The station attendant looked under the fender and discovered the problem. In kicking off the ice, I had broken the wire that connected the gas cap with the battery.

Apparently this is what has happened to many Christians. They have been cut off from their source of power. Unbelief, unconfessed sin, careless living, worldliness in action or attitude—all of these can rob us of power. And a Christian robbed of power cannot be used of God. "Without Me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Why does God share His power with us? So that we can build great churches for our own glory? So that we can boast of our own achievements? No! "To Him be glory in the church!" The Spirit of God was given to glorify the Son of God (John 16:14). The church on earth is here to glorify the Son of God. If our motive is to glorify God by building His church, then God will share His power with us. The power of the Spirit is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

But the amazing thing is that what we do in His power today will glorify Christ “throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph. 3:21). The church’s greatest ministry is yet to come. What we do here and now is preparing us for the eternal ages, when we shall glorify Christ forever.

He is able to do all—*above* all—*abundantly* above all—*exceeding* abundantly above all!

Get your hands on your spiritual wealth by opening your heart to the Holy Spirit, and praying with Paul for strength for the inner man ... for a new depth of love ... for spiritual apprehension ... and for spiritual fullness.

“Ye have not because ye ask not” (James 4:2).<sup>1</sup>

*The Conclusion to the Prayer* (vss. 20, 21). Paul closed his prayer with a lofty doxology. These verses, however, are more than the conclusion of the prayer. They are really the grand climax of all that has been set forth in chapters 1–3 about God’s purpose and our redemption. They assure us that God is abundantly able to carry out His plans.

Verse 20, which speaks of the inconceivable greatness of the power of God, expresses Paul’s confidence in God to meet our every need. As comprehensive as the apostle’s requests are, they are more than matched by God’s power to answer them. William Carey’s motto, “Expect great things from God,” catches the spirit of this verse.

In using the words “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” Paul was laboring to express the boundless reach of God’s power. It exceeds all our requests; it exceeds even our highest thoughts—and this “exceeding abundantly.” How wonderful it is that we who cannot begin even to comprehend God’s power are yet privileged to be the earthly instruments through whom His power operates.

“The power that worketh in us” is described in Ephesians 1:19ff. There we learn that it brought Christ from the grave and raised us from spiritual death. Such power can subdue within us all our base passions and make possible the achievement of every worthy and noble goal in life. There is a hint here that the only limitation on God’s power is our willingness to permit Him to work in us freely.

Verse 21 is an ascription of glory to God. Glory belongs inherently to Him; it is His exclusive prerogative. It is our responsibility to acknowledge it, reflect it, and make it known. The word is very broad in its meaning and therefore is not always easy to define. As a general rule, it denotes God’s majesty and splendor. Here, however, it seems to shade off into the idea of praise.

The chapter closes with a reference to the church as the sphere within which the glory of God is exhibited. The suggestion is that the glory of God is the very reason for the church’s existence. As the Westminster Catechism puts it, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” We can add nothing to the inherent glory of God, but we can so live as to enable others to see His glory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [\*The Bible exposition commentary\*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 33–34). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan, C. (2002). [\*Ephesians\*](#) (pp. 84–85). Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press.

## The Doxology (3:20–21)

THE DOXOLOGY BRINGS the first half of Ephesians to a close at the place it began in 1:3, in giving praise to God. Doxologies in the form “glory to God” are frequent in the New Testament, though most are much briefer. The use of “glory” in Ephesians and throughout the New Testament is fascinating. God is a God of glory (1:17; Acts 7:2), and his glory reveals who he is (John 1:14; Rom. 6:4; Heb. 1:3). God gives glory to Christ (John 17:22; Acts 3:13; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Peter 1:21) and people (Rom. 2:10; 8:30; 1 Cor. 2:7). Christians are transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). People are to do everything for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31) and are to give glory back to God (Eph. 1:6; Phil. 1:11). In the eschaton further glory will be revealed (Rom. 8:18). “Glory” is a word that virtually encompasses the whole of Christianity. Here the focus is on the praise and honor that should be given God for his saving work.

This doxology is striking in its assertion that glory is given to God “in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.” No other passage mentions the church explicitly in a doxology, although other doxologies imply it because Christians are the ones giving the praise. To suggest that the church and Christ are accorded equal status is presumptuous. The passage only assumes an unending relation between God, his people, and Christ. The presence of the people with God, made possible by Christ, will be a cause for eternal praise. This is what Paul had in mind in 1:18 with the expression “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (see also 2:7).

In verse 19 the love of Christ is beyond understanding, and in verse 20 the activity of God is beyond expectation or thought. The heightened language throughout the prayer shows the depth of Paul’s emotion. A wordplay occurs in the Greek text of verse 20 between “to him who is able” (*to dynameno*) and “power” (*dynamis*). Note the preponderance of words for God’s activity, a theme that has marked the letter from 1:1.

This doxology sums up the intent of the first half of the letter. We should praise God for his astounding work in Christ Jesus. Paul’s point is not merely that God is able to do beyond what we expect. Rather, this power is already at work in us (cf. the similar language in Col. 1:29, which describes God’s work in Paul’s ministry). God does not fit the limitations of our expectations. The language is reminiscent of Isaiah 55:8–9: God’s ways and thoughts are exceedingly beyond our ways and thoughts. God is at work and eager to work in us to achieve his purposes for salvation.<sup>3</sup>

### Bridging Context

THIS PRAYER IS as appropriate to pray today as it was two thousand years ago, and its theological ideas are directly applicable for our lives. The most difficult part in this process takes place on an emotional level. Paul’s emotions soar and lead him to spiritual heights in worship. How can these emotions be transferred so that we feel the same impact for our own worship? Emotions come out of deep convictions and personal involvement. Unless the theology takes deep root, the emotions—while they can be faked—cannot be authentically reproduced.

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<sup>3</sup> Snodgrass, K. (1996). [Ephesians](#) (pp. 182–183). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**Still praying.** It seems obvious that this passage asks us, like Paul, to pray and praise. A theology with any conviction should drive us to prayer and worship. Theology is not for grand ideas and academics, but for expressing our relation with God. It is not merely talk about God, it is addressed to God. “Worship is an act of inner agreement with God.” Prayer is “the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the Spirit of God pronouncing his works good.” This is what Paul does in 3:14–21. The highest point of view is the realization of what God has done in Christ. In anticipation of the day when every knee will bow to him, we do it now.

Ephesians as a whole is a lesson in worship. Like 1:3–23 the prayer and doxology here are descriptive and theological in character, concerned more with God than individual need. They are rooted in the character of God, focused on Christ, and pointed toward eternity. They are wholistic rather than myopic. In such prayers, the comments about God increase understanding and commitment. They draw us nearer to God and make us more receptive to him.

The doxology invites us to meditate on God, the One who is much more powerful than we anticipate. This is not an invitation to think up self-centered grocery lists of tasks for God to do. Rather, it is a call to realize God’s unanticipated power to effect change in us, in keeping with the power already working in us.

**God our Father.** Once again we find a worldview in which God is at work, a worldview that clashes with our normal expectations. The God of Ephesians is involved in the lives of his people. The central message of the Bible is that God lives with us. This message is present throughout the *whole* Old Testament, from the Garden of Eden to the tabernacle, the temple, and the destruction and rebuilding of the temple. The presence of God is heightened in the New Testament—a message that goes from the name “Immanuel” at Jesus’ birth (Matt. 1:23) to the promise of his presence until the end of the age (28:20). In John’s Gospel and letters believers *remain* with God and Christ, and God and Christ with them (e.g., John 15:4–7). In Acts humans live, move, and have their being in God (Acts 17:28). Paul’s “in Christ” language also underscores a theology of the presence of God. We need this theology to motivate our Christian lives.

The focus on God as Father requires attention. We noted above three ways this imagery is used: a narrower sense limited to Christ, the customary sense in reference to believers, and in a few texts like 3:14–15 of all people. We would do well to think of these as concentric circles, with Christ being at the center, then believers, and then all humanity.

For some people the image of God as Father is problematic. The inadequacy of human fathers often makes the image an obstacle rather than a help. Several commentators argue that God as Father is the archetypal image from which all fatherhood is defined—that the image is not applied to God from human experience, but to humans from God. This argument has validity, but it is of little help to those who have experienced the failure of human fathers in destructive ways. The church must assist such people to recover what it means to call God “Father.”

More problematic theologically is the use of such a patriarchal image to describe God. Modern feminist concerns work to redefine God or use matriarchal images in worship. The issue here is not the use of inclusive language on the horizontal level; we should make every effort to include all persons in worship and teaching. The problem arises over whether “Father” should be changed to a neutral term like “Creator” and whether God can be addressed as “Mother.” This question is not unrelated to the first issue of the inadequacy of human fathers, for often women recoil against masculine language precisely because of the abuse done to them by men.

These questions are not easy, partly because of the conventions of the English language and partly because of the metaphorical character of all language. No adequate treatment can be given here, but several comments are in order:

- (1) The use of the title “Father” has nothing to do with maleness. God is not a man, and gender does not provide an appropriate description of God. The title “Father” has to do with origin, love, security, and care.
- (2) While all language is metaphorical, matriarchal images for God in the Bible are rare and, when they do occur, are similes (using “like” or “as”), which seems to place them in a different category from the use of “Father” as a specific title.
- (3) Although practice may be changing quickly, in English masculine language has the potential to be generic, but feminine language is specifically feminine.
- (4) The use of *Abba* and the frequent use of “Father” by Jesus and throughout the New Testament (and the church’s history) makes the term too important to cast aside. The relational aspects of “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are too important to be replaced by “Creator,” “Redeemer,” and “Sustainer.”
- (5) Use of feminine language for God is particularly open to abuse because of associations with birthing and nature, as is evidenced in ancient fertility cults, certain Gnostic sects, and in modern neopaganism associated with the new age movement. However, even biblical terms like “Father” can be abused and twisted away from their intent. Application of this title will need to be sensitive both to people and to the range of theological problems.

That God is the Father from whom every family is named means partly that we all have the same origin and value. We belong to a larger human family, all members of which, as the first part of their definition, owe their allegiance to God. We all belong to each other. The built-in arrogance of every race, nationality, and clan has no ultimate basis. In 2:11–22 racism was obliterated through the work of Christ. In 3:14–15 we are shown that racism never had any basis in the first place.

**A life at work.** This prayer assumes that the Christian life is not automatic. Life from God comes as a gift, but it is not magic. It is a life of engagement with God’s Spirit, who makes Christ and his purposes known. Life is relational, and relations require time and investment. God intended from the first for humans to live in relation to him. With God’s Spirit taking up residence in us, that intent is realized.

Paul’s prayer does not spell out how the Spirit’s work occurs. Clearly with regard to daily living, the Spirit comes as gift, just as initial conversion is a gift. Nothing we do can cause God’s Spirit to merge with our spirit (cf. Gal. 3:2–3). But the implication that we do nothing is a colossal error. The Spirit will not empower unwilling, inattentive spirits.

Paul’s prayer indicates God’s people should be aware of the need for the Spirit, attentive to God’s purposes and leading, at work on the interior life, and ready to be obedient. The entire letter—both the theological descriptions in the first three chapters and the ethical instruction in the last three chapters—assumes that instruction, understanding, decisions, and effort are all required for people to enjoy the work of the Spirit. The doxology in 3:20 emphasizes that God is at work in us, but implies that we need to be more aware and more expectant of his work. Ephesians 5:18 instructs us to be continually filled with the Spirit. We are responsible and active in this process. Passivity does not fit with Christian faith.



*A problem.* Paul prays for power and strength for his readers and asserts that God is both able and at work in them. This is a lofty goal and description. But if this is so, if the Spirit is supposed to empower Christians, why don't we experience this power more? Why are the church and its people so ineffective? This is a problem we must face, but only two answers can be given:

- (1) The theology is wrong; it sounds nice, but God is neither able nor at work.
- (2) The theology is right, but we abort the process.

In answer, the problem is with us, not with God. The Spirit of Christ does not work in us without our willingness, nor does he move us to the desired goal overnight. He lives with us, and this life is a growth process. We are finite, limited, and prone to failure. The real problem is that we do not *care* enough. We do not have the necessary discontent within ourselves that will lead to change. We like the privileges without the bother. But nothing in this life happens that way. What the Spirit seeks is the willingness to hear. Faith does come by hearing.

**The centrality of love.** That love is structurally central in the prayer is no accident. To experience Christ is to encounter his love and to be put on a path of understanding love. Now we see how the hostility mentioned in 2:14, 16 was killed. The love of Christ destroyed both the hostility between humanity and God and that between various groups of human beings. The love of Christ is shorthand for the love of God experienced in Christ.

With good reason love is one of the five words summarizing the Christian faith. In fact, the whole of Christianity is caught up in the words "truth" and "love," and as we will see, these two words dominate the second half of the letter. As both source and goal, love will define and regulate all Christian action. Therefore, love ought also to be central in our lives.<sup>4</sup>

## Contemporary Significance

MOST OF THE application of this text flows easily from the comments in the previous two sections. Action is now required.

**Learn to worship.** This text requires us to place a priority on prayer and worship. We do not do either particularly well. To some degree the church of our day has forgotten how to worship. We find ourselves unhappy with traditions and older forms and unsatisfied with the superficiality of new music and practices. In too many cases the congregation become spectators. Churches should be much more intentional in learning about prayer and worship. Meaningful worship does not merely happen; it results from attention, thought, and effort. More is required than worship planning. We need worship education and authentic worship experience. We need a worship that involves people, rather than one that asks them to watch. This rediscovery of worship presupposes a mature spirituality that can do the job. Ephesians provides both the theological resources and the models to begin the task.

**God as Father.** The fatherhood of God is the foundation that determines our responsibility to other people. We cannot ignore the needs of others if we share a common origin in God and a common value before him. We live in a world bloated with suffering and poverty. We cannot fix

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<sup>4</sup> Snodgrass, K. (1996). *Ephesians* (pp. 183–187). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

the problems of the world, and providing help to people is not easy. But the fatherhood of God requires us to care and get involved, to speak and act to help out.

In addition, the fatherhood of God will not allow us to draw a circle around Christians as the limits of our responsibility. We enjoy an unparalleled unity with those in Christ, but a broader unity with all human beings exists as well. We may not ignore non-Christians or relate to them by some lower standard. We are human first and then Christian, made authentically human by being Christian. Many things exist that are human and not Christian, but nothing is Christian that is not also human. We must do justice to our humanity in order to do justice to our Christianity.

In that vein the issue of racism must again be confronted. Two fatal blows to racism are encountered in Ephesians: (1) Christ's death, which destroys hostility and creates oneness; (2) the fact that God is Father of us all. Racism is an enemy against which the church must speak and act. Not only is racism an attack on other groups, it is also an attack on God, for the people being disparaged are his people, people he created and about whom he cares.

*But not God as male.* As indicated above, I would insist on the importance of calling God "Father." At the same time the church should go out of its way to remind people that God is not male, something it has neglected to do. We do not need to compound the language problem by sloppiness in communication. Occasionally we should introduce prayers with words such as "You who are neither male nor female." Occasional use of biblical *similes* that use feminine imagery (e. g., Isa. 66:13) will help. Great sensitivity needs to be exercised in *caring* for people with appropriate language about God, avoiding both the error of bashing people with patriarchal imagery and the error of reimagining the faith. Both errors are idolatrous and in effect attempt to create God in our own sexual image. Our primary concern must be communication that will connect the biblical God to a hurting world. Language creates a world, a perception of reality, within which we live, and the world we create should both honor God and extend grace to all those around us.

**Permeated with Christ.** The imagery of the text also challenges our conceptions about faith. Rather than a small Jesus tucked away somewhere in our souls, the text assumes the presence of one who gives shape and strength at the core of our being, who takes up residence in and redefines us. Nothing is wrong with the language of *Christ living in us*, even though I have de-emphasized its use in favor of the much more frequent Pauline language of *our being in Christ*. Both ideas are powerful, and behind both stands the conviction that Jesus is Lord, the one to whom our lives are given and by whom they are determined.

If we are permeated with Christ, such cherished ideas as independence, self-determination, and self-fulfillment must be abandoned, at least as they are understood in our society. Christ's indwelling means we are not our own (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20; Gal. 2:20). W. Wink correctly described worship and prayer as reminders of "who owns the house." Christians are to live as if they know Christ owns the house. Regarding independence, we are independent of everything but Jesus Christ, and on him we are totally dependent. Regarding self-determination, we in our uniqueness are determined by him. Regarding self-fulfillment, we seek to fulfill God's will. This negation of self, however, is in actuality a finding of one's true self in relation to God, for that is the purpose of creation. In losing life, we find it. In trying to keep it for ourselves, we lose it.

**True freedom and true self-actualization are found in life with Christ.**

This is the language of discipleship. To be permeated by Christ is to be stamped by his character, to be clothed with him (Rom. 13:14). Such imagery underscores the way Christ shapes our lives. **The thought that we can believe in Christ without being like him is absurd.** If Christ's indwelling does not transform, we must question strenuously whether Christ is present. The

application of the text of Ephesians requires us to test the validity of our faith (see 2 Cor. 13:5). Christians worry about the assurance of their salvation, and other Christians seek to remove all doubt. Maybe we should let doubt do its work. Maybe we should be more concerned about the validity of faith than the assurance of salvation. Honest doubt can be healthy.

**Contemplation.** Paul prays that the Spirit will strengthen our inner being. Philip Spener said, “Our whole Christian religion consists of the inner man or new man, whose soul is faith and whose expressions are the fruits of life.” Application of this passage involves contemplation and reflection. Rather than merely chasing after our physical needs and desires, we must attend to our interior lives. Our inner being requires as much care and exercise as our physical bodies.

Moreover, Melancthon’s statement “To know Christ is to know his benefits” is mirrored in this text, but is made more specific. To know Christ is to know *his love*. From knowledge of God’s love an ethic of love will be shaped in the following chapters, but human love is not the concern here. We must experience God’s love and the wonder and worship that result from it. That love provides the nurture and stability for life, which creates confidence and trust. The words for knowing imply meditation on the wonder of God’s love, from which comes praise.

**We should also contemplate God’s power.** The beginning of the doxology (v. 20) is in essence an invitation to consider how great God’s power is. Again we see how much Christianity is focused on the mind. Ours is a thinking religion. Its goal is not abstract reasoning or academic pursuits separated from practical doing, but an informed mind that shapes life. The message of Ephesians requires heart, head, and hands. Christians need time for reflection, for remembering, for searching into matters too deep for knowledge. The suggestion not to bother with subjects too grand for comprehension is ill-advised. In being stretched by what is beyond us, we grow. Inquiry after the unknowable God provides the knowledge and wisdom we need for life.

Christians need a regular schedule of reading, thinking, discussing, and praying that informs them about faith and life and helps them grow a soul. Most of us think we are too busy for such time-consuming exercises, but the inner being is not strengthened by osmosis. Our busy schedules are often filled with secondary—if not needless—concerns. Some activities may need to be laid aside, but the contemplative part of faith is not one of them.

*Your God Is Too Small.* This was the title of a book written years ago by J. B. Phillips, a book that still merits attention. That title could have been drawn from Ephesians 3:20. Surely this is the real problem behind the failure of Christians to understand and live their faith. The problem is *theological*; our image of God—the idol in our minds—does not merit contemplation, devotion, or obedience. Our God is too remote, disinterested, and inept. In fact, he is too much like us (cf. Ps. 50:21). We neither expect anything from him—unless it is a handout—nor are we engaged with him.

Our view of God can never include all that he is, and his ways and thoughts will always be far above us. But the God of the Bible is not too small. Here is the God we need for life. Our contemplation and learning always have one goal, that of the *Shema*—to love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, and our strength (Deut. 6:4–5). The goal is not knowledge about God, but knowledge of God, the experiential knowledge that leads to love for God. Such experiential knowledge changes behavior.

This is one reason why Ephesians is so *theocentric*. Paul wants his readers to know how great God is, how magnanimous and loving his acts are, how powerful he is, and what he has accomplished through Christ. If people understand how mighty, loving, and active God is, then true worship and transformation of life follow.

*The path to knowledge.* As important as study, contemplation, and discussion are, they do not provide the essential ingredient. The Holy Spirit is the key to the knowledge we need. He is the revealer, the one who makes known to us the “deep things of God . . . that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Cor. 2:10–12). The power of the Spirit is less for great deeds than for great understanding, from which godly living flows. The Spirit’s work is not independent of our activity or a substitute for our effort; rather, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom. 8:26). He works with us to strengthen our inner being. We do not cause his activity; the point of 3:20 is that the power of the Spirit—the Spirit given to *all* believers—is *already* working in us. What we seek is our spirit being brought into line with God’s Spirit’s. What is required is the openness to allow God to work, the willingness to hear, and attention given to life with God.

**Glory in the church.** The exalted ecclesiology of Ephesians has important practical consequences. The church is not an optional part of Christianity. Rather, it is the place now and throughout eternity where God is given honor and glory. Just as Christ is the evidence of God’s redeeming love, the church is the evidence of God’s transforming and uniting power (cf. 2:7). An exalted ecclesiology is not the same as a glorified and exalted church. God is glorified, not the church, except in being the recipient of God’s love. Church history is marred by too many times and places where the church thought it was exalted. Whenever the church felt it had power, it was most in danger. This is still true. The church exists for worship and service and must perform those acts with the same humility as her Lord. Then God is given honor and glory.

In writing this commentary, one of the most difficult tasks has been in dealing with the contrast between what Ephesians describes and the reality I and most Christians experience. So often the church demonstrates more evidence of human depravity than of God’s transforming and uniting power. A common problem for Christians is finding a suitable church. So many people become so disillusioned in that search that they retreat to a controllable, privatistic faith.

No quick fix exists for the failure of the church other than the theology of Ephesians and the rest of the New Testament, but two points must be made. (1) Failure to meet with other Christians for worship and instruction is not a legitimate option. Individualistic Christianity does not exist. We need other people to help us understand God. (2) The current failure of the church cannot be tolerated. The church does not have to look like any of our present conceptions, but Christians must develop a better understanding of God, of faith in Christ, and of unity, and then put that understanding into practice. No doubt the biggest obstacle is the human ego, but should that obstacle be so determinative for Christians who gather around an empty cross? Christians in the pews as well as the pulpits need to protest the arrogance, superficiality, and division that mark our churches. We do not have to agree on all points to respect each other, to be driven by God’s love, to recover the meaning of faith, to exhibit life in Christ, and to worship God.

God our Father,

We acknowledge that we and every other person has his or her origin in you.

We owe you our lives.

Forgive us for the arrogance of thinking we are better or more important than other people.

Let your Spirit work in us to strengthen us. We want your Spirit to merge with ours.

Make the presence of Christ so real that we sense your love and live from your love.

Help us understand how deep your love is so that it changes us into your very image.

You who are all powerful beyond anything we can conceive, we praise you. Every accolade of worth we throw at your feet. You alone are God. From your worth all other worth is determined.

For the gift of life in Christ we and all your people worship you. Together and forever we will sing your praise. Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, K. (1996). [Ephesians](#) (pp. 187–192). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.